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Understanding NGO professionals' perceptions of the significance of their work

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Understanding NGO professionals' perceptions of the significance of their work
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Abstract: The inception of this study stems from my past experiences as a professional in a nongovernmental organisation (NGO) within the education sector. The work of NGOs is a critical part of the education landscape of India and in that regard their significance is often documented as a collective, with little or no consideration of their member professionals. Developmental work is slow and difficult, no less in the context of disadvantaged sections of society, and it is the NGO professional who, as the fundamental unit of an NGO, is directly relating to it. To that extent, this study is grounded in *understanding how NGO professionals perceive the significance of their work*.

The research process broadly adheres to the interpretivist paradigm and using the methodological framework of phenomenography explores the variations in perceptions of ten NGO professionals of the significance of their work. These variations formed the basis for the construction of the outcome space which represented the distinct categories of description of the experiences of the significance of their work. In this regard, there were two overarching categories within which the professionals perceived the phenomenon in question, *Personal significance* and *Professional significance*. The former emphasised how the significance of work was felt at the personal level, while the latter explicitly addressed how they related to it at the professional level. These two ways of understanding the significance of work were established in further detail within smaller and more specific categories of description. The relevance and meaning of the findings were developed in relation to concepts pertaining to career choice, social justice, impact of NGOs, professional identity and significance of work.

This study provides a fresh take on the significance of work privileging the voices of NGO professionals. In that, the study puts forth a framework by which working professionals may judge the significance of their work and organisations may reform their structures to improve the overall significance of work as experienced by their employees. More importantly, it develops the critical position of the NGO professional in relation to educational development.

Keywords: career, education, identity, NGO, NGO professional, phenomenography, significance of work

To Oulu,

No place will ever be quite as quiet.

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Contents

1 Introduction

The topic of this study emerged as a consequence of a long drawn process of thinking about my own experiences of working in an NGO (nongovernmental organisation) in Ahmedabad, India.

Over the course of two years, I spent six days a week at a government school teaching at the primary level. I was a fulltime teacher at the school, employed and placed there by an NGO. Like all government schools in the country, the school I was assigned to was open to any child regardless of their background. However, the children present in the school came from families having a low socioeconomic status and residing near the school. Teaching and caring for children from underprivileged communities were difficult undertakings to carry out successfully. Nonetheless, it was the kind of work that interested me so I invested the effort to ensure that my duties as a primary school teacher in that school were properly performed. Unfortunately, despite my intention and effort, I struggled to improve their educational abilities and outcomes. While preventing a slow failure as a teacher and trying to keep up the responsibility of the teaching process, the perceived hardship of daily experiences had me pandering to several moments of despair during my two years at the school. These experiences had me questioning my purpose and place as a working professional within the ethos of the school and the communities it catered to.

The NGO professionals who managed us as teachers were tasked with the development of our professional identities. This was established in part through periodic meticulous conversations and classroom observations. What came through from those meetings was that a critical component of their work was to help us make meaning of our experiences. Even though I engaged in those meetings, I felt that it did not aid in my professional development or help me connect to the teaching process. This led me to harbour feelings of isolation and inadequacy within myself, following which a sense of futility set in, and that strongly affected the way I thought about the work I was doing.

The experiences that defined the period I was associated with the NGO have been the basis for many discussions. Some of these discussions were conceived with my colleagues at the NGO, who like me were placed in under-resourced schools, and later similar ones were developed with fellow students at the University of Oulu. Some common motives that surfaced during these discussions were the difficult and complex nature of the work, the lack of recog-

nition of said work and the impact, if any, of that work. The pertinence and similitude of their experiences to that of mine, pressed me to think critically about our place, as NGO professionals, in the education system and more generally, the society. More specifically, as will be worded in the research question later, how we derive significance from our work as NGO professionals. Wherefore, I wanted to understand how a variety of people from different NGOs perceived and understood their work.

Here, I developed how this study was conceived. The two sections incorporated in this chapter elaborate on what context it was developed and how the research question was framed.

1.1 Contextual framework of the study

The broad context of this study is limited to the education sector of India. The choice to position this study within the region of India was made after due deliberation. There were a few factors that influenced this choice. The foremost one was that of accessibility, on which was dependent the type and number of research participants I would be able to gather. The second among them was that of the conception of the topic of this research. Since this topic was conceived as an outcome of my own experiences within the Indian scenario, it seemed to be a relevant context to initiate and place my research. Another essential consideration was that of familiarity of the background. Relatively, as I am more closely acquainted with the processes and systems of India than any other region or nation, it would prove useful in understanding the participants' responses.

There are several issues that affect and impede the development of the education system in India. For instance, being as culturally and linguistically diverse as it is, India is the site of any and all related concerns. These cultural issues alongside socioeconomic barriers can limit or, worse still, remove the possibility of educational influence in certain regions and communities. Therefore, addressing and combating educational issues such as access, quality and equity are not only essential but also complicated. The remainder of this section will briefly put forth some aspects of the state and development of the school education system in India as charted in the available literature.

The education scenario in India has been prone to significant changes over time, but it has resulted in the establishment of a defined structure for the educational process. The administration of education shifted from being localised in ancient India to becoming centralised

during the colonial period (Annamalai, 2005, p. 20). It then settled into a system, post-independence, where such a responsibility was to be shared by both the central and state governments and educational rights were provided by the constitution (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2008, p. 4). Presently, the structure of the education system (Figure 1) is given by the 10+2+3 pattern (ibid.). The first number in the pattern signifies the combined years of schooling at the lower primary, upper primary and lower secondary levels; of which, the first eight years, corresponding to the ages of six to fourteen (or the grades one to eight), are deemed to be a part of compulsory education (ibid.). The completion of ten years of schooling is marked by a successful attempt at taking the secondary school examination, following which the +2 aspect comes into focus, where individuals are allowed to diversify their choice of subjects as per their interests (ibid.). These two years in higher secondary concludes in passing a public examination, thereby qualifying individuals to partake in higher education. The +3 feature, representing the number of years required for a higher education degree, is liable to change based on the course of study or the individuals' educational pursuits. Similarly, even though all systems of education prescribe to the general structure represented below, the specifics are subject to change at the discretion of the state governments (ibid.). Moreover, what is closely aligned with the structure of education is that of the medium of instruction. In this regard, the English language has gained widespread significance, not out of a disposition to the colonial construct of knowledge but because of a need for individual and national economic advancement (Annamalai, 2005, p. 31). Accordingly (ibid.), the place of English as the medium of instruction at the tertiary levels of education (p. 31) and as the lingua franca of the global market (p. 32) prompts the development of English-medium schools. This essentially downplays the cultural and linguistic diversity of the nation and creates pervasive impediments to the progress of education in India.

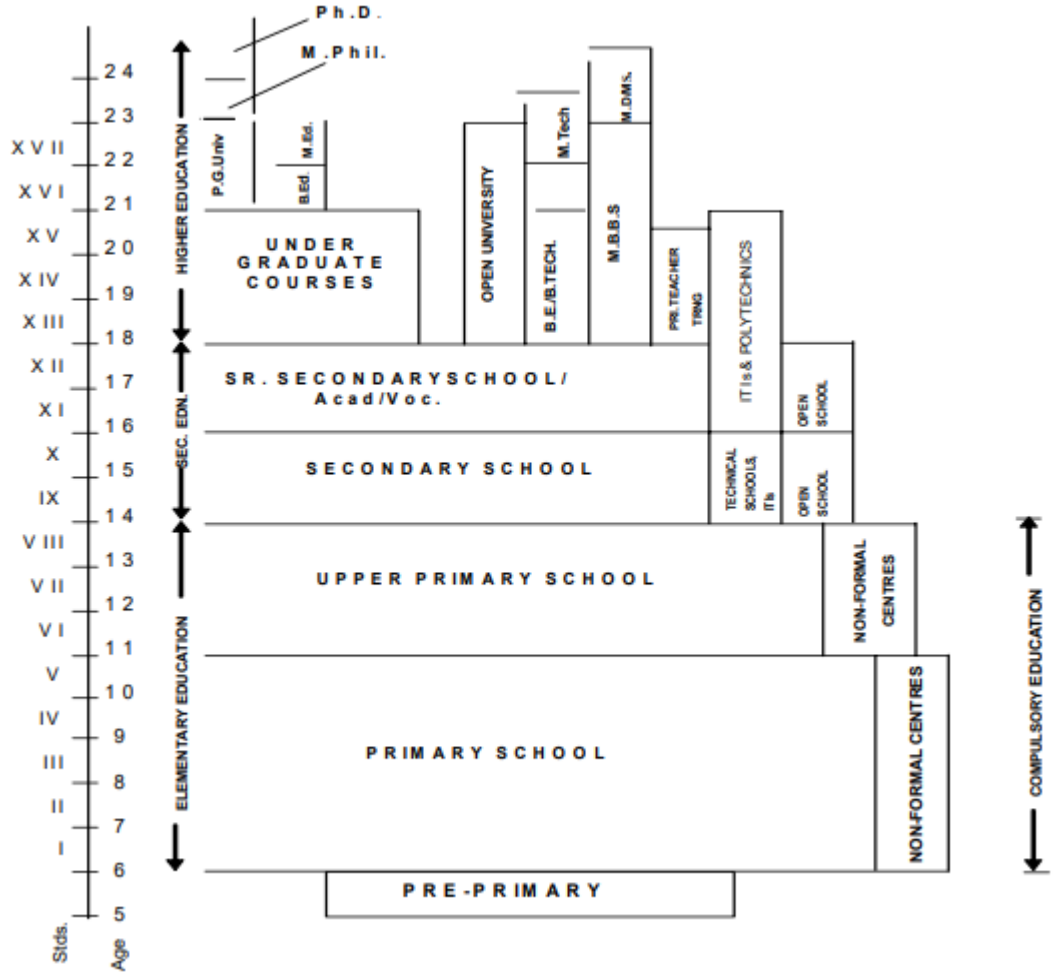

Figure 1. The structure of the Indian Education System (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2008).

Like unfavourable linguistic affiliations, there are a few other issues that affect India's ability to meet the objectives set in the national programme, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). This programme is directed at ensuring universal access to education between grades one to eight, with respect to international initiatives such as Education for All (EFA) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2008, p. 2). To explain the situation of the development of India's education systems further, the following paragraphs explore it through the standpoint of access to education and elaborate on the issues pertaining to the quality of and equity in education.

In India, where more than a third of the world's child population, aged six to eleven, is out of school (Mehrotra, 2006, p. 261), the issue of access to education is a rather pressing matter. As per Govinda and Bandyopadhyay's (2008) review, since the 1950s there has been a steady growth of schools (p. 6). As a consequence, the number of primary schools within a kilometre

and secondary schools within three kilometres of inhabited areas has increased; a growth has been marked by the establishment of schools comprising of a single teacher and a single room (ibid., p. 6). Therefore, by definition, children have access to education, but that access is severely limited, if not absent altogether. For example, when the teacher is absent because of a leave or training purposes, the school remains closed (ibid., p. 7). Additionally, while enrolment in schools has improved drastically, reducing the rural/urban divide, there is an evident gender disparity in rural areas where close to a third of the girl population has never been enrolled (Mehrotra, 2006, p. 263). This disparity is even starker when children from indigenous groups or communities are taken into account (Joshi, 2010, p. 551). Plus, the incidence of early dropout remains significantly higher for children from marginalised sections of society (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2008, p. 37; Mehrotra, 2006, p. 263) and/or in rural areas (Mehrotra, 2006, p. 263). Of the children who do manage to finish primary school, few make it to grade ten and the numbers dwindle further in higher secondary grades (Lewin, 2011, p. 382). In part, the lack of attendance and dropout rates can be attributed to the public spending pattern, such as the constant underfunding of the primary school system (Mehrotra, 2006, p. 266), financial constraints of families of school-going children and a general lack of interest (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2008, p. 35; Joshi, 2010, p. 551). Adding to concerns around access to education, the perspectives on the quality of and equity in education illustrate the bleak realities that affect the educational situation.

The concerns around the quality of and equity in education are most prominent when understood with regard to the disadvantaged groups and communities of the country. For example, pre-independence, the children belonging to the untouchable caste were enrolled in separate schools where the instruction was inefficient, providing only the most basic reading and writing skills (Nambissan, 1996, p. 1013). In present times, such inequalities are more severe in the case of the indigenous communities which lag behind the broad populace in terms of literacy rates and educational attainment, with a considerably low literacy rate among women (Joshi, 2010, p. 547). While it may not be generically easy to integrate children from such communities into the mainstream processes of education, it is vital that some kind of education be developed to accommodate their beliefs and way of life. It is necessary that they partake in education if only to alleviate their living conditions, as they are stated to be the most underdeveloped social group in the country, based on the developmental indicators of education, health and income (ibid., p. 547). The process of integration, even in relation with less isolated groups, poses a few challenges. This can be observed, for instance, in the inclusion of

disabled learners within the mainstream education systems. There are various barriers to implementation, ranging from inadequate resources to the negative and damaging outlook of teachers and the community to insufficient support due poor socioeconomic conditions (Singh, 2016, p. 3227). Similarly, the inclusion of ex-untouchables, post-independence, was in fact characterised by exclusion as they were often told to sit outside the classroom or in a designated corner (Nambissan, 1996, p. 1018). Teachers did not check their slates or punish them even, out of fear of being polluted (ibid.). Overall, there was a general outlook of social inferiority with regard to their presence (ibid.). Regardless of how abhorrent those circumstances were, more recently, the general situation in that regard has improved. Nonetheless, in certain regressive and rural areas, such beliefs and practices may still be present. In such difficult social situations, the role of the teacher in mitigating the situation is critical.

As teachers are constantly perceived to be the most influential factor in the educational process, efforts to improve the quality of and equity in education are being made for their benefit. Such is being put to practice through the para-teacher scheme. A para-teacher is a professional who essentially belongs to the community or shares its beliefs, thus helping to establish a stronger connection between the school and the community, often substituting for primary teacher shortages (Pandey, 2006, p. 320). These professionals are often placed in areas that are rural and remote and/or lacking in basic facilities, factors that de-motivate qualified teachers (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2008, p. 22). While this may ensure a certain level of quality in education, it cannot be regarded as an effective long-term strategy in raising the quality. This is reinforced in the studies by Govinda and Bandyopadhyay (2008) and Pandey (2006) which suggest that governmental support for the para-teacher scheme may diminish the need for a qualified workforce and affect the professional identities of teachers, thereby lowering the quality of education (p. 25; p. 333). Moreover, as Govinda and Bandyopadhyay (2008) point out, qualified teachers may not evidently be better than their contractual counterparts as they are quoted to have similar constraints and issues (p. 25). Therefore, it is imperative that resources be allocated to the development of an effective workforce of qualified teachers if quality of and equity in education are to be achieved and maintained.

Broadly, the work of NGOs is directed at improving the lives of people and in this regard it is one of the leading actors in furthering international development agendas (Scheyvens et al., 2016, p. 375). In the case of India, the work of a network of NGOs that, directly or indirectly, impact access to, quality of and equity in education has become a legitimate force in the development of education. An NGO is defined by Gao (2006) as “any non-profit, emphasis on

voluntarism, self-governing and pursuing a mandate of providing development services, undertaking communal development work or advocating on development issues" (p. 15). In this respect, Rose (2009) points out that their aims and motivations are often subject to doubt (p. 220). With regard to education, NGOs are seen to develop alternate strategies to education in contrast to those used within the conventional public systems, in order to reach those individuals most excluded from government provision (ibid., p. 221). To a certain extent, NGOs have been able to aid and assist individuals having poor socioeconomic backgrounds and living in remote areas or places with a paucity proper facilities. This is evident from the documented research on NGOs in the country, for instance, the support provided to small schools in isolated areas in terms of pedagogical development, teacher training and curriculum restructuring (Blum, 2007, p. 7). Or, the sponsorship of a school for children from families afflicted with leprosy (Gibb, 2012, p. 1). Or, the provision of a nutritious mid day meal at school to address the malnourishment issues of children in rural areas (Sharma et al., 2010, p. 763). All of these examples have a consequential impact on the educational growth of children from underserved and at-risk communities, even if it is in an indirect manner as with the last reference. It is necessary that such developments in the education sector be charted and shared, as the circulated information could result in collaborative endeavours, thereby enhancing developmental capacities of both NGOs and the communities they work with.

This section provided an overview of the structure and situation of the education systems within the Indian scenario to contextualise the study. The succeeding section establishes its direction in a more concrete fashion by framing the research question.

1.2 Research question

The function and relevance of work is vital to how people make meaning of their lives. How their work affects their lives depends, to a certain extent, on the nature of the work and their level of involvement, be it compulsory or optional. These factors, amongst others, also influence the manner in which people think of their work and their place with respect to it. In that regard, the notion of the significance of work comes into perspective. In a world of increasingly standardised jobs, it is important to understand what it is that makes a particular kind of work stand out to the person who is doing it.

In light of global sustainability initiatives, this research attempts to position itself with respect to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In particular, the Sustainable Development

Goals (SDGs) with a clear link to this study are: “Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”; “Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all” (United Nations, 2015, p. 16). These two goals are directly associated with the aims of this research as it relates to both the work of NGO professionals and educational development. However, if seen within a broader bracket then by the extension of the aforesaid goals, Goals 3, 5 and 10 emphasising well-being, gender equality and reduction of inequality (ibid.), respectively, are implicitly linked to the study. The acknowledgement of the study’s link to these goals allows for a framework of research that is sensitive to sustainable development.

This study can prove to be important in at least two aspects. One, it could serve as a guide for individuals in the NGO sector to understand and/or evaluate their own perceptions and experiences regarding their work. Two, it could be used as a point of reference by NGOs and other agencies to better understand their employees and thereby facilitate a more suitable work environment for them. However, the importance of this study may be limited in its purview given the specificity of the context and the type of targeted research participants, that is, those working within the education sector.

This study aims to document and analyse NGO professionals’ perceptions of the significance of their work within the context of India. In that regard, the research question of this study is:

How do NGO professionals in the education sector perceive the significance of their work?

2 Theoretical framework

Before developing the components of this chapter, it is necessary to explain the rationale for their selection as the theoretical basis for this study. The significance of work, as will be later explored, can be categorised in diverse ways, each of which may be regarded at par with the others. In addition to reviewing the significance of work, this chapter develops four prime aspects of work that affect how working professionals experience its significance. These aspects of influence were well established in the results. They are given as choice of career, social justice as the basis of education, the impact of the work of NGOs and professional identity (Figure 2). The sections that embody these aspects were developed based on their relevance to the work of NGO professionals in the education sector. All together, they culminate in framing the significance of work, with any missing elements and links addressed its namesake section.

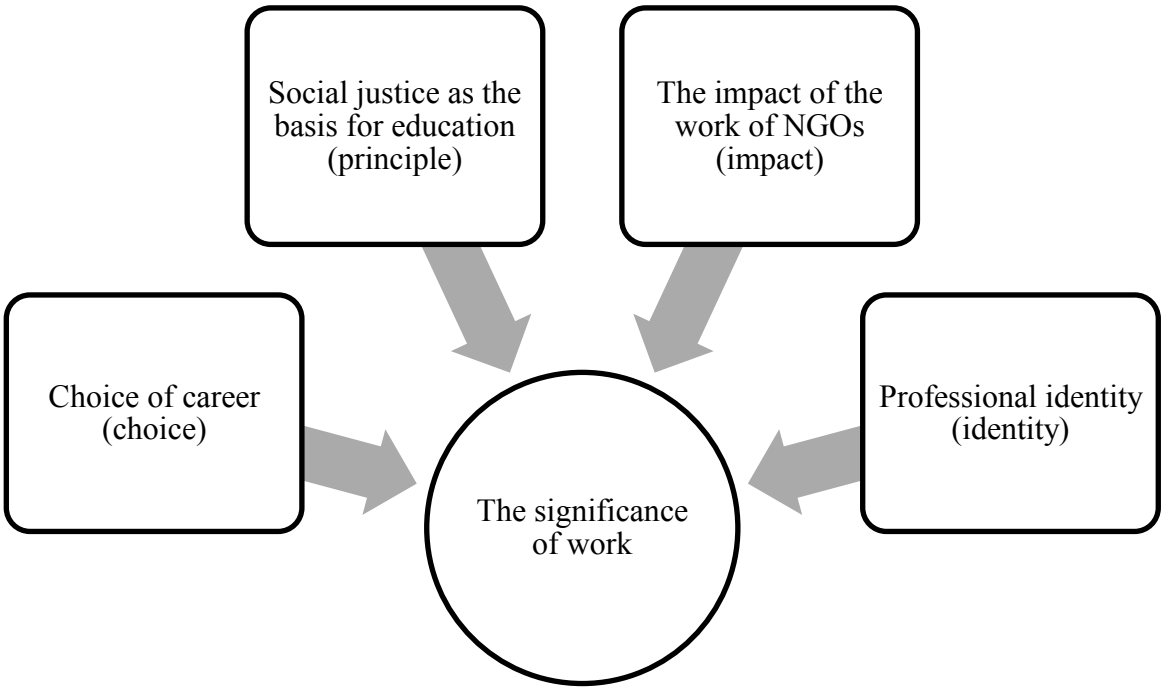

Figure 2. Theoretical factors framing the significance of work.

2.1 Choice of career

Career choice is an important starting point for two main reasons. One, it lays a base for understanding why an individual may opt to do the work that they do. Two, it could provide some insight into how an individual perceives the significance of their work. To that extent,

this section details various aspects of career choice and its process of establishment and further development.

Career choice has a critical bearing on the lives of individuals and examining how it is formed may help determine what it means to any given individual. According to the social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 2000, p. 36), there are two levels of analysis for understanding the formation of career choice. One is cognitive-person variables like personal interests and the other is contextual variables like physical attributes (ibid.). Contextual variables significantly affect the development of cognitive-person variables in two distinct ways, as distal contextual factors and proximal ones (ibid., p. 37). To clarify the two terms, distal refers to background variables that help form personal expectations and interests such as having a role model, while proximal refers to those that affect the active part of the choice-affirming stage of a career; an example of such a variable would be discriminatory practices at work (ibid., pp. 37-38). Additionally, in an earlier study, Lent et al. (1994) acknowledge that personal attributes, including physical and psychological traits, external contextual factors and open behaviour affect one another in a bidirectional fashion (p. 82). This would mean that not only do these three aspects affect each other but also that they together shape the perceptions of individuals regarding their choice of career. This is clearly exhibited in Lent et al.'s (2002) discussion of their study's findings, explaining that personal variables such as outcome expectations and values were vital in career choice formation, while contextual factors, although not widely quoted by the participants, played a recognisable function and that direct work experiences, which may be interpreted as overt behaviour, notably influenced their respective choices (p. 68).

To assess why there was a variation in the explicit recognition of contextual factors, it is necessary to understand the direct and moderating effects of contextual variables. On one hand, the path from interest to goals and subsequently from goals to actions may be moderated by factors such as insufficient social support or financial considerations (Lent et al., 2000, p. 38). On the other, the same path may be nonexistent owing to the direct influence of factors such as family pressure and external expectations (ibid.). Environmental factors assuming a causal role can also manifest innately at the systemic level. For example, adolescents in the United States have an unclear understanding of career choices due to lack of vocation specific education, whereas, in Germany, their counterparts are encouraged to participate in the process of career choice formation (Johnson & Mortimer, 2002, p. 41). From this, it is evident that the presence or absence of social support is a decisive factor to realising a career choice. To that

point, in Lent et al.'s (2002) study, participants frequently cited that social encouragement was instrumental in meeting their career choices (p. 67). The same study (ibid.) also reported that participants credited to a fair extent the success in realising their choices to personal attributes (p. 67). Therefore, the alteration of the path towards the realisation of a career choice will depend on the intensity of contextual factors when viewed alongside the strength of personal attributes. Moreover, the orientation of the career choice trajectory will be based on whether the same contextual factors play to or against an individual's interests. Since, as Kniveton's (2004) study shows, parents appear to have more influence than teachers it is crucial to evaluate the familial aspect in the career choice process.

There are a variety of factors, intermingling in a complex manner, that form the contextual influence of the family on career choice. Taking into account the previous argument, it is pertinent to closely deliberate how supports and barriers to career choice play out within the family. Paloş and Drobot (2010) identify that an individual's awareness of their values, interests and abilities inform the career alternatives suitable for their choosing, but arriving at the appropriate career choice is in part affected by the family's financial, human and social capital (pp. 3407-3408). Reinforcing the claim partially, Lent et al.'s (2002) study found financial constraints to be the leading impediment to the realisation of career choice (p. 66). Accordingly, while barriers may restrict the realisation of a certain career choice, it may positively affect the realisation of a backup choice or other alternate choices (Lent et al., 2000, p. 40). It is here that the question of propriety of such a choice arises. It induces an acute concern as a career choice may be a long-lasting decision, if not a permanent one, to endure as an alternative to one's initial outcome expectations. The concern might eventually become a barrier in the pursuit of that alternate choice and affect how one views their career choice, therein, affecting their perceptions of the significance of their work. Moving away from explicit barriers such as inadequate financial backing, the place of familial structures and relationships comes to into focus. An aspect of family dynamics affecting the individual's career choice process is how they perceive their relationship with their parents. That is, if a child has ambivalent feelings toward parental support and presence, they may fail to reach a certain level of efficacy, thereby affecting their personal and professional outcomes (Paloş & Drobot, 2010, p. 3410).

Self-efficacy is an important factor in the career choice process, which, in part, is influenced by gender. The concept of self-efficacy was found to be a reliable predictor of vocational interests, their respective alternatives (Hackett, 1997, p. 235) and other career relevant processes (Ackerman & Beier, 2003, p. 211). The concept becomes slightly more complex when

gender is taken into consideration. Likewise, in a study by Correll (2001), males saw themselves as more mathematically competent compared to their female counterparts but did not hold the same view regarding verbal tasks. This shows that perceptions of efficacy vary based on gendered perspectives, which explains why there is a difference in understanding occupational efficacy with regard to male- and female-dominated careers (Hackett, 1997, p. 235). This essentially creates psychological barriers to individuals opting for occupations that are aligned to their career interests, leading them to choose from other alternatives. How self-efficacy is developed or impeded is also determined in some ways by gender. This is explained by Kniveton (2004) who reports that females have more mature reactions to initial working experiences than males and form career attitudes much earlier (p. 2). Or, Hackett's (1997) study, even though dated, may have an insight as to how the perspectives on women's efficacy with regard to their careers are situated alongside domestic responsibilities (p. 238). Here, the concurrence of perceptions of self-efficacy and the influences of gender can be seen to effectively dictate the career choice process. However, to say that it is solely reliant on self-efficacy parameters would be incorrect, as this shift in career aspirations may, in part, be explained by varying emotions or individual priorities.

The place of emotions and associated thoughts are often at the centre of the career choice process. As Emmerling and Cherniss (2003) write, past experiences that have stimulated variant feelings are fixed as emotional memories which may manifest as somatic impulses during any decision making process, such as deliberating on career relevant choices, thereby affecting its outcome (p. 160). Additionally, as emotions have traditionally been associated with the development of personality (ibid., p. 155), which has been deemed a necessary factor to accurately understand the match of an individual to a career (Ackerman & Beier, 2003, p. 211), the level of emotional growth in individuals could likely affect how they decide on their careers and thereafter react to those decisions.

This section has brought together the many aspects that affect the decision making process of choosing a career. The following section will explore social justice, a possible guiding ideology in the career choice process, as the scaffolding implement for educational development.

2.2 Social justice as the basis for education

The pursuit of social justice is a purposive endeavour in itself, but when paired with education, it can become a compelling force of change. In an unequal society, education can be an

effective equalising agent. Education in its most basic form encourages learning, but how that learning takes place and who benefits from it are issues addressed by ideas of social justice. This also keys into the work that NGOs commit to, that is further represented in the way their professionals function and how they come to choose such work. This section looks at how the notion of social justice guides the role of education in creating more equal and inclusive education systems for society in its entirety.

The first step towards understanding the purview of social justice in education is to analyse it with regard to the context. In taking into account the contextual realities of schools and the communities it serves, educational professionals will have the capacity to critically develop relevant strategies. Thrupp and Lupton (2006) argue that contextualising schooling would initiate a much less generic discourse that has long tended to address education in all schools with the same frame of reference (p. 311). If attention is paid to specific social complexities and injustices within various schooling contexts, it would affect the way resources are allocated, the kind of support and advice provided and result in a more appropriate evaluation of the schooling process in each school (ibid.). Just as Ford and Moore (2013) point out, these injustices could stem from negative stereotypes towards a specific group or even an anti-achievement ethic in the immediate lives of students within their communities (p. 403). In adding to the discourse, Lupton (2005) introduces the unpredictability factor within schools in poor neighbourhoods where changing rates of student absenteeism and unspecified incidents could disrupt daily lessons and schedules for both the classroom and the school (p. 595). This does not mean that such schools or their stakeholders should be regarded with disrepute as Thrupp and Lupton (2006) sensitively address the issue (p. 313), but it does point to systemic inefficiencies that are particularly prominent in disadvantaged contexts.

If undue pressure is asserted on schools in disenfranchised contexts without prior consideration, it only perpetrates further injustice. For example, Lupton (2005) writes that teachers admitted to failures in ensuring quality as contact time with students was taken up by various other processes like behavioural supervision, counselling activities and management of equipment (p. 597). As a result of which these teachers also endured severe emotional duress (ibid.). Implicitly, the state of their poor mental health could also be contributing to the declining state of quality. To teach and cater to students from disadvantaged backgrounds is undeniably a mentally intensive activity and without the required support, even the most skilled teacher would struggle in ensuring a quality education. Therefore, it is important to consider the context in which teachers work in to understand how it affects their teaching pro-

cess. Yet, as Thrupp and Lupton (2006) discuss, the analysis of the effectiveness of teachers and schools is carried out independent of the context in which they function (p. 320). This means that the outcome of such an analysis would be inaccurate in the least. This could create a misconception of a school's collective performance, meaning that a substantial part of the cause of lower performance would be missed entirely.

A rather disturbing downside of the generalisation of outcomes of schooling processes, one that has seldom been neglected even in social justice discourses (Polat, 2011, p. 50), is that disabled learners go unrecognised. Disabled learners are an important, if not sizeable, part of the contextual environment of any given school. Polat (2011) notes that while there has been an effort to integrate such learners in the schooling system, it has not amounted to inclusion (p. 54). There is an infrastructural lag in facilitating inclusion, inadequate awareness about disabled learners and insufficient and untrained personnel to support inclusion in schools (ibid.). In part, to counteract these external influences to underachievement of students in these contexts, Ford and Moore (2013) put forth that educators should focus on internal factors that affect identity development, such as self-perception and motivation (p. 404). To develop the quality of education with regard to context and principles of social justice, and not subject it wholly to performance measures like test scores, would an effective step in ensuring a fair process.

An essential aspect to fostering a socially just schooling environment and sensitising the community is to ensure educators see social justice as an indispensable function of education. To that extent, as Katsarou et al. (2010) write, it is imperative to address what goes into teacher education to develop feelings of solidarity among the teacher candidates in relation to the communities they might work in (p. 149) and equip them with the proper tools to integrate themes of social justice within mainstream curricula (p. 150). This relates to Dover's (2013) claim, that beginning teachers struggle to carry out their plan for social justice education due to administrative pressures (p. 10). A more social justice centred teacher education, if accepted as the norm, would need to be supplemented with a framework of support at the school level. Otherwise, ensuring a socially just educational process might become overwhelming for an individual teacher. Some aspects of such a support system within schools are addressed in the available literature. As Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy (2005) observe, those who lead schools will significantly impact social justice (p. 208). Hence, it is vital that the preparation of school leaders focus on a shift in perspective of school leadership: from being limited to the enhancement of managerial capacities to being a critical, responsible and empowering

presence within a school (ibid., p. 214). In addition, Mullen (2008) advocates for democratically accountable leadership which calls on all stakeholders linked to schooling processes to play their part to ensure structural and procedural reliability and fairness (p. 147). It is an astute understanding that leadership should be a collective endeavour. In that manner, it sets a strong precedent on how to sustain social justice in education.

As Lupton (2005) writes, social justice in education, in its most basic form, sets forth that every student should have equal access to a quality education irrespective of their outcomes (p. 589). NGOs are active partners in the practical implementation of a social justice approach in bringing about a systemic change, and the impact of their work is paramount.

2.3 The impact of the work of NGOs

The general impact of the work of NGOs, as with other organisations, is central to their growth and influence. The work that they do typifies them as organisations, but the impact of that work is what informs how they are viewed. The phrase 'impact of work' may suggest that impact is understood as that which is experienced by the people, or systems the NGOs are working to assist. However, the impact of their work is not just limited to those aspects. This section underlines the various perspectives outlined in literature on the presence and impact of NGOs as developmental agencies in society.

The impact of NGOs, as Gao (2009) writes, can be viewed in terms of how it manifests at the micro and macro levels (p. 16). At the micro level, NGOs are responsible for providing direct resources and services to people and systems (ibid., p. 16). They can be supplementing governmental processes to provide education (Nishimuko, 2009, p. 281) or trying to improve community participation in basic education (Makuwira, 2004, p. 113). At the macro level, NGO impact can be seen in terms of its influence on policymaking (Gao, 2009, p. 16; Pillay, 2010, p. 92) or, in certain cases, as affecting the structure and control of the government (Haque, 2002, p. 412). As is clear from the micro/macro perspectives, the levels of impact vary, however, what is not evident from these citations is the nature and intensity of that impact as perceived at those levels.

The perspectives on the impact of an NGO's involvement in developmental processes, notwithstanding globalised forces, are subject to change depending on the organisation, context and the overall local circumstances (Klees, 2008, p. 23). However, as referenced in Schuller's

(2007) study, there are also certain ambiguities and contradictions in viewing the involvement of NGOs within the same context as well (p. 96). Some of this ambiguity in perspective apparently stems from an inadequate understanding on how an NGO actually facilitates the development of people and systems it is associated with (Makuwira, 2004, p. 113). For example, Pillay (2010) writes that by emphasising globalised education NGOs may in fact severely affect a country's link to its cultural and linguistic heritage (p. 93). Additionally, while the intensity of impact of an individual NGO could be enhanced by inducing collaborative strategies, it is actually being restricted due to competition for funding (Klees, 2008, p. 22). This is not to disregard the intentions of NGOs, but to point out that regardless of their intentions, as well meaning as they might be, the perceived effect is rather different from the intended effect. The capacity of NGOs to be objective in addressing that difference is a matter that ought to be reviewed regularly. This can be improved by inducting members of the community in the planning and assessment processes as is done in the case of participatory development. Even in that there are misgivings about the practice as NGOs often do not actively engage the people of the community in planning and decision-making agendas, thereby diverging from the principles of participatory development (Makuwira, 2004, p. 117). This, in turn, affects how such programmes impact the local communities and systems. As Makuwira (ibid.) cites, change and development should be based on the needs and challenges of the community as viewed by its members (p. 116). Despite the inability of NGOs to meet the developmental needs of the communities they work for, they continue to proliferate around the world in a variety of contexts.

The growth of the NGO sector around the world has had a critical impact on a region or government's sense of efficacy. An increase in basic developmental issues and the network of NGOs at the grassroots level to address those issues has reduced the reach and institutional potency of the government, thereby discrediting its role as a central actor in social development (Haque, 2002, p. 412; Klees, 2008, p. 22; Pillay, 2010, p. 100). In some cases, this can be explained, in part, by the absence of government policy on collaboration with NGOs resulting in them being unaware of the priorities of the government (Makuwira, 2004, p. 115). Moreover, as the work of NGOs often tends to be linked to ideologies of donor groups (Klees, 2008, p. 22; Schuller, 2007, p. 105), it might not be in tune with government policies and efforts. However, overall, it is the global rise in neoliberal forces, augmenting the privatisation of processes of social development, that is, the emergence of NGOs, which has subverted the role and responsibility of the government (Haque, 2002, p. 422; Klees, 2008, p. 23; Pillay,

2010, p. 100; Schuller, 2007, p. 100). There is no disputing that NGOs can be an effective body in guiding social change, but if in doing so it hurts the efficacy of other bodies instituted to do the same then the aggregate development would be significantly diminished.

Within the purview of educational development, some specific instances documented in literature that clearly describe the deep positive impact of the work of NGOs is explored herewith. As Nishimuko (2009) puts forth, the Education for All (EFA) initiative calls for civil society participation to further its goals, meaning that aid is provided not only to governments but to NGOs as well (p. 281). This has greatly benefited the development of education in several contexts. Where government support and funding for education is limited, NGOs can directly contribute. As in the case of Sierra Leone, where a particular NGO was responsible for ensuring a range of facilities from the rehabilitation of schools and provision of furniture to revision of school syllabi and assisting local NGOs with shared goals (ibid., p. 287). Here, the objectives of the NGO and the government were aligned, so the impact seemed to be more pronounced. For an NGO in India, the impact was still more specific. In some rural areas, where schools had barely enough students to warrant a teacher per grade, multigrade classrooms (one teacher for two or more grades) were established, resulting in poor quality of education (Blum, 2009, p. 7). To alleviate the impact of such circumstances on the quality, the NGO reported in the study (ibid.) developed an enhanced child centric teaching methodology best suited to the teachers, parents and students from those areas (p. 7). A positive externality of these efforts to improve educational quality in schools is that it contributes to poverty alleviation (Makuwira, 2004, p. 114). To ensure that their constructive impact continues to grow, NGOs themselves must endure a substantial degree of work.

The impact of the work of NGOs extends to the lives of its professionals as well. To state the obvious, the work that an NGO does is essentially the result of individual and/or collaborative efforts of its member professionals. To that extent, an area of impact of their work on their own lives is that of work/life balance. As per Shaikh et al. (2019) and Sturges and Guest's (2004) studies, work/life balance can be characterised by the presence of satisfaction and productivity at work while maintaining a healthy and sociable personal life (p. 45; p. 6). However, as Padaki (2007) puts it, NGOs possess a double façade, that is, they are responsible and considerate organisations on one hand but on the other, their work demands that the employees ensure it comes before their families and personal interests (p. 72). As is given in Sturges and Guest's (2004) report, the number of hours put into work is directly correlated to the feelings of work/non-work conflict (p. 6). This work/life conflict that is established due to

an imbalance between the workplace and life outside of it, as Buddhapriya (2009) puts it, apparently tends to affect women more intensely than men as they are the ones responsible for the majority of the tasks with regard to home and the family (p. 33). It should be acknowledged here that this perception may not hold true in households where familial responsibilities are shared equally by all members or even in single earner households. Adding to the work/family conflict, demanding working schedules can cause mental duress, depression and physical stress write Shaikh et al. (2019, p. 53). The same study (ibid.) also mentions that, if a proper work/life balance were to be achieved, then it would contribute to the NGO worker's sense of satisfaction and engagement capacity with regard to their work (p. 54). Essentially, it may not be a question of how much work an individual is made to do, as some might be more willing than others to endure longer work hours, but why does such work have to entail longer and harder work days.

Understanding the type and range of impact of the work that NGOs commit to and do allows for a more sensitised appreciation or judgement for the work that is being done by the organisations and their employees. Notwithstanding the toll on those employed by NGOs, the work itself contributes to the development of one's sense of being and professional identity.

2.4 Professional identity

The notion of professional identity is a central aspect in any type of work. In that, the kind of work people commit to and carry out has a deep impact on the manner in which such an identity is constructed and borne. The consequent sense of identity not only informs the work that people do but also their perceptions of that work and themselves in relation to it. Therein, the concept of professional identity is critical to the process of understanding a working individual in a holistic manner. Accordingly, this segment lays out some of the discourses that expound the role and relevance of professional identity in the working life of an individual.

Professional identity, as is referenced by Dobrow and Higgins (2005) and Ibarra (1999), may be understood as a combination of various personable aspects ranging from beliefs to experiences by which one defines oneself in a professional capacity (p. 569; pp. 764-765). Trede (2012), on the other hand, showcases a more general perspective in writing that professional identity is about being aware of the knowledge of what it is that one as an individual stands for and the priorities at work (p. 163). Thereby, it is clear that professional identity draws upon the qualities and circumstances of a working individual to establish a form. The profes-

sional identity of an individual may be examined in terms of social identity (Haslam et al., 2000, p. 323; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007, p. 16) and relational identity (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007, p. 11). These different components of identity essentially accommodate multiple understandings of identity that contribute to an individual's perception of their significance in the work they do. For example, "when social workers experience their selves as complex and dialogical, they are more open to the influence of the other" (Miehls & Moffat, 2000, p. 339). This implies that perceptions of the self can affect an individual's professional identity and vice versa. How such a professional identity is formed can be conceptualised in different ways.

One conceptualisation, as put forth by Ibarra (1999), is that individuals are in a continuous process of restructuring their selves (p. 765). They do so to match their present capacities to their conceptions of what is expected of them, thereby creating fleeting images of themselves until a more concrete one is established (ibid.). In effect, this process could be furthered by inducing effective feedback mechanisms and facilitating socialisation in complex work environments (Dobrow & Higgins, 2005, p. 569), which is also tied to improving self-reflective abilities of working professionals as self-reflection is regarded as a way to build better relationships (Miehls & Moffat, 2000, p. 342). As Gini (1998) points out, people are not neutral when it comes to the subject of work (p. 707). This reinforces the importance of self-reflection and self-awareness in how people identify themselves with regard to their work. Second, Dobrow and Higgins (2005) assert that having wider developmental networks exposes an individual to various prospective role models and qualities that could serve as a guide to forming a professional identity most relevant to their situation (pp. 569-570). This network of people essentially embodies a larger set of interactions that support mutual professional identity development. Ideally, the presence of such a network could also moderate how people negotiate with their identities in work role transitions as put down in Ibarra (1999, p. 766) and Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010, p. 136).

A third conceptualisation, not explicitly involving working professionals, focuses on the pedagogical process, where working experiences are introduced into the academic curricula so as to enhance an individual's sense of their professional identity (Trede, 2012, p. 164). Such a process could entail experiencing professional roles through internships, field studies and work placements or even voluntary work. This also factors into the career choice process, as discussed in section 2.1, because it helps individuals decide on what professional roles are most suited to them.

The process of formation of a professional identity may be a transparent representation of the work itself. This is reinforced by Braine and Roodt's (2011) study, where job resources, that is, various aspects of a job which reduce mental and physical strain, improve efficacy and boost individual learning and progress (p. 4), were found to be positively related to professional identity (p. 9). Moreover, even when a professional identity is relatively stable, it is still liable to change as per the influence of factors such as disillusionment and an increase in the amount of work and corresponding hours (Gini, 1998, p. 709). Conversely, an investment in professional identity development can be predicted to affect the overall work engagement and output. Likewise, studies list work-based social identity as an important determinant of organisational outcomes (Haslam et al., 2000, p. 333) and how an individual identifies with any given work group or organisation (Braine & Roodt, 2011, p. 3), therein impacting how they choose to engage in the work assigned to them.

The process of identification with an organisation is principally, if not wholly, contingent on the culture of the organisation. The organisational culture has a considerable influence on the kind of professional values (Padaki, 2000) and relationships (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007), hence, on one's identity as well, developed and maintained within a workplace. Depending on the structure of the organisation, its culture could support rigid power relations that stunts individual growth or facilitate a decentralised work ethic which promotes professional empowerment (Lok & Crawford, 2004, p. 323). This contributes to the nature of the professional identity. Moreover, the effort to maintain such an identity is also bound by the larger institutional and cultural structures of an organisation (Watson, 2008, p. 130). What this means for member professionals of an organisation is that they are constantly adjudging themselves based on their embodiment of role-based identities and the relationships that stem from it (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007, p. 11) and on how they accommodate their individual values with that of the organisation's as elaborated by Padaki (2000, pp. 194-195). Accordingly, an individual may be able to associate or dissociate their sense of self with/from the variable social identities present as a result of institutional circumstances (Watson, 2008, p. 131). Additionally, regardless of how separate an individual might think of the concept of the self to be, it is also established in relation to the other or external aspects (Trede, 2012, p. 161; Watson, 2008, p. 130). Therefore, the nature and dynamics of organisational culture is a crucial element in how a working professional thinks of their work and themselves in relation to it.

This segment on professional identity placed stress on a few related conceptions. The development and maintenance of a professional identity is an evident part and consequence of work and is closely related to the significance of work.

2.5 The significance of work

As the concept that this study is built around is the significance of work, some conceptions around it as well as an alternate term will be outlined. This section also briefly illustrates how the concepts elaborated above contribute to the conceptualisation of the significance of work.

The significance of work is a broad framework used for understanding the various interlinkages between an individual, their work and society. Williams et al. (1975) and Rim (1977) list economic, social contact, social position, security, intrinsic work satisfaction, patterning of time, self-realization and power as the various ways by which the significance of work can be established (p. 51; p. 135). This division of significance in relation to work sets a comprehensive structure for describing and evaluating the same. However, both studies develop the forms of significance solely in relation to the individual. The significance of any type of work is not limited to the functions it serves for the individual, but it may also be viewed in terms of its functions in and effects on society. At this point, it should also be noted that the aforesaid references are quite dated and while that does not, in this case, dilute the reliability of those studies, it does warrant additional conceptual developments to vitalise their stance on the subject. Even so, more recent studies, such as that of Perrucci et al.'s (2007), also seem to focus on the personal and immediate social aspects of work like health, well-being and family life of the individual in relation to its significance (p. 600) and not how the work affects the system per se.

Setting the individual as a point of reference works to the advantage of this study because, even in consideration of the significance of work as felt by society and its systems, its relevance is to be examined primarily vis-à-vis the perceptions of individuals. In that, Williams et al. (1975, p. 45) appositely develops the position of the individual in trying to understand the following. One, what importance do individuals assign to their work that allows them to evaluate their professional roles against that of other roles in other social systems (ibid.)? Two, recognising as how individuals are required to work, what sort of significance do they seek to derive from their work (ibid.)? It is clear that the place of significance in work can be understood in a systematic manner if approached from a specific point of reference. To clarify am-

biguities that may surface in understanding the conceptualisation of the significance of work, a similar term, the meaning of work, is presented below.

The examination of the meaning of work is essential to the development of this theoretical framework in two respects. One, it increases the scope of available literature that may not have been reviewed under the titular reference of the significance of work, even if it were directly related. Two, in conducting and writing the research, the meaning of work serves as a clarification on the significance of work and what it might embody.

The meaning of work is not only synonymous with the significance of work but also adds depth to its understanding. This is reinforced by Rosso et al. (2010) in stating that "it moves beyond hedonic perspectives of work behaviour to deeper considerations of purpose and significance" (p. 93). That is, it addresses more complex aspects of an individual's relationship with their work and not the mere particulars of conduct at work. Similarly, establishing psychological meaningfulness with regard to work contributes to one's sense of significance (Steger et al., 2012, p. 3). In association with that, the perceptions of the meaning of work are influenced by four definitive sources which are the self – entailing personal characteristics like values and motivation; others in relation to the self – identifying people like co-workers and family members; work context – ranging from the basic organisational structure to that of national culture; and spirituality – embodying aspects such as sacred callings (Rosso et al., 2010, p. 93). Such is partly supported by Westwood and Lok (2003) in positing that "the meaning of work displays considerable variability across time, location, and social strata" (p. 139), therein, encompassing the sources of relational others and the work context. Here, it is necessary to understand the ways in which these sources factor into the meaning or meaningfulness of work. Meaningfulness of work is constituted by processes that allow an individual to define their worth (individuation), work for something greater than their selves (contribution), become aware and understand one's self (self-connection) and respect those around them (unification) (Rosso et al., 2010, p. 115). The credibility of this referential scale of the meaningfulness of work is recognised by Steger et al. (2012), as the authors repeatedly cite its importance in understanding the same.

This paragraph maps together the earlier segments of this chapter with the conceptualisations of the significance of work discussed in this section. This is necessary to ensure a certain level of structural cohesion and clarity. To begin with, the concept of professional identity as expounded in section 2.4 explicitly covers the aspects of the self, others in relation to the self

and work context. Such is with regard to the effects of organisational culture on an individual's values and relationships or how an individual's engagement with their work is linked to how they identify with those around them. Similarly, social justice in education and the impact of the work of NGOs as analysed in sections 2.2 and 2.3, respectively, are centred on the meaningfulness of the process of contribution. The career choice process explicated in section 2.1, that illustrates how an individual decides on a career, by consequence affects all aspects of the significance of work listed in the studies of Williams et al. (1975, p. 51) and Rim (1977, p. 135). The type of career that an individual chooses impacts the kind of jobs they opt for, which, in turn, determines how much they get paid, the nature of the jobs, with whom they interact, how they develop as professionals and how satisfied they are with the work they have committed to do. Additionally, these sections frame how significance of work may be felt by the system, which is not explicitly recognised in the framework cited by Williams et al. (1975, p. 51) and Rim (1977, p. 135). This brings together the five sections explored within this theoretical framework.

This section compiled a variety of aspects linked to the significance of work and has set up a working understanding of the same. How it is explored further is dependent on the choice of methodology, as the following chapter will clarify.

3 Methodological framework

The development of this study hinges on how it perceives and adheres to the framework of qualitative research. In this regard, the broad theoretical paradigm and research design comprising this framework are elaborated herewith.

An established beginning measure for undertaking qualitative research is to understand its overarching theoretical or research paradigm. As Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) state, it is "the choice of paradigm that sets down the intent, motivation and expectations for the research" (p. 2). In the case of this study, the theoretical paradigm that informed the direction of research and the phenomenographic stance was interpretivism. To frame a clear understanding of interpretivism it is important to consider its ontological and epistemological assumptions. As per Wahyuni's (2012) study, ontology is concerned with the perspective on how an individual perceives any given reality, whereas epistemology is the perspective on how the individual creates, comprehends and applies conventional and valid knowledge (p. 69). With respect to the established definitions, the ontological assumption of interpretivism holds that reality is socially constructed and therefore it is prone to change (ibid., p. 70). Whereas, the epistemological assumption claims that the meaning of knowledge is subjective and the basis for understanding it is situated in the social and contextual phenomena (ibid.). An additional aspect of epistemology is that it seeks to understand the relationship between the researcher and researched (Vasilachis de Gialdino, 2009, para. 8). This is a notable feature of epistemology with regard to interpretivism as it facilitates the constructive nature of interpretivism. That is, the researcher, acting in accordance with the interpretivist standpoint, acknowledges the effect of their own beliefs and experiences on the research (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006, p. 4). The researcher develops the research from an emic perspective, focussing on the participants' constructions of their social reality as arrived at through interaction and dialogue (Wahyuni, 2012, p. 71). In that sense, the axiological stance of the paradigm is established. This concludes the paradigmatic structure of interpretivism. However, how it is realised in this research remains to be reviewed in relation to phenomenography. There lies the place of qualitative research. As it is a conventional understanding that interpretivism primarily employs qualitative methods (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006, p. 7; Thanh & Thanh, 2015, p. 25).

The form a qualitative research takes on and is ultimately presented as depends on the research design it follows. Even though, qualitative research questions essentially emphasise

three key areas, language and interactive patterns within specific social groups, detailing and interpretation of perceptions linked to phenomena and theorising through the commonalities and linkages in the data (Fossey et al., 2002, p. 723), it is the research design that determines the structure and content of the research and further distinguishes it from other similar studies. To that extent, a research design embodies five basic characteristics: its compliance with the theoretical position, accommodation of the social context, propriety of the sampling process, the adequacy of the sample size, that is, whether or not it justifiably addresses the research question (Marshall, 1996, p. 523), and the transparency of the process of data collection and analysis (Fossey et al., 2002, p. 724).

This establishes the place of qualitative research as the developmental framework for this study. The two sections in this chapter deliberate on the suitability and implication of phenomenography as a research methodology and develop its analytical structure.

3.1 Phenomenography

This section explicates the scope and structure of phenomenography as a research methodology to realise the established research question. Additionally, given that phenomenography as a research approach is qualitative in nature (Yates et al., 2012, p. 96) and is aligned to the interpretivist stance (Green, 2005, p. 34) that this study takes, its underpinnings appear to be well-founded.

In order to institute phenomenography correctly, it is necessary to examine its relevance with regard to the research question. In that regard, the defining terms in the research question responsible for directing the content of the study are “perceive” and “the significance of their work”. According to Marton (1981, p. 177) the latter term is a reference to a first order perspective, in that it is describing the aspectual events of the world, whereas the former is referring to a second order perspective concerned with how people describe and experience those aspectual events. Marton (ibid.) labels the study of this second order perspective as phenomenography, “that is, research which is directed towards experiential description” (p. 180). In this regard, the focus of the research would be on the details of experiences of the significance of work and not on generic perceptions of it. Therein, my role as researcher would be to use relevant research tools or methods that are directed at gathering such experiential details. Furthermore, Ashworth and Lucas (1998) point out that several mental processes, ranging from perceiving to understanding, are used to refer to the experience (p. 415). Consequently, as

Yates et al. (2012) make clear, research questions that reflect a second order perspective as the object of their study are of "a 'how' and a 'what' nature instead of 'why'" (p. 99). The "how" aspect, as it is a part of the research question posed earlier, informs the structural development of the study. Taking into consideration the compatibility of the research question with that of phenomenography, its application in this study will be explored further in the following paragraphs.

Phenomenography is based on non-dualist ontological and epistemological assumptions (Yates et al., 2012, p. 98). Thereby, it maintains the notion that "we cannot separate that which is experienced from the experience per se" (Marton, 1981, p. 180). Such a phenomenographic stance lays stress on the understanding that both knowledge and reality are developed as interpretations of the result of internal relations and interactions between people and the world (Green, 2005, p. 34; Yates et al., 2012, p. 98). It directs the research towards multiple interconnections and pluralistic relations between the subjects and the world as understood through the variations in the perceptions of the subjects. Mauthner and Doucet (2003) highlight the importance of a relational ontology in discovering critical elements of participants' responses that had previously gone unnoticed (p. 422). This develops my place as a researcher with respect to the participant, an extension of the epistemological and ontological foundations of phenomenography. Hence, the manner in which this study explores the phenomenon of the significance of work during researcher–participant interaction is, to an extent, prone to the influence of my perspective as a researcher (Sin, 2010, p. 313). The resultant meaning of the knowledge produced from such an interaction would be subjective in nature (Green, 2005, p. 34). In this manner, the responses of participants could be moderated to reflect a clear portrayal of their experiences of the significance of work and their selves in relation to those experiences (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003, p. 423). Therefore, in adhering to a non-dualist approach, the structure of phenomenographic research makes it possible for this study to delve deeply into the experiences of NGO professionals with regard to the significance of their work.

The objective or knowledge interest of phenomenographic research is to qualitatively collect, categorise, illustrate and analyse individuals' variations in experiencing any given phenomena (Dortins, 2002, p. 207), in this case, the significance of work. To that extent, Yates et al. (2012) write that there are a number of terms used interchangeably to describe the knowledge interest of phenomenographic research (p. 100). Some of them being "conceptions, ways of experiencing, ways of seeing and ways of understanding" (Yates et al., 2012, p. 100) and

"ways of apprehending" (Marton & Pong, 2005, p. 336). This is an important clarification as it references various synonyms that may be used in association with this phenomenographic research, more so because they refer to its basic unit of description (Marton & Pong, 2005, p. 336). In that regard, this established knowledge interest of phenomenography is in line with the purpose of this study, which is to document and understand differing perceptions with regard to a common phenomenon. That is, the significance of the work of NGO professionals. In order to meet such a knowledge interest, it is important to examine the structure for phenomenographic research.

The structure of phenomenography constitutes the processes by which an outcome space pertaining to the phenomenon of interest is developed. To begin with, phenomenographic research emphasises face to face interviews that are semi-structured in nature where the reflective process of the participant is supported by the interviewer (Yates et al., 2012, p. 102). This is in line with the non-dualist approach that was previously referenced. Next, the data analysis process helps "systematize forms of thought in terms of which people interpret aspects of reality" (Marton, 1981, p. 180) and sets the base for the emergence of the outcome space. Here arises a common concern, which is that there is no single prescribed method for phenomenographic analysis (Yates et al., 2012, p. 102). However, even though separate studies appear to have differing number of stages to extract, categorise and summate the data, there are a few consistencies in the analytical approach (Conolly, 2019, p. 47). These manifest as three distinct processes: familiarisation with the data, pooling together of identified units of meaning and the categorisation of said units of meaning into structures to form the outcome space (ibid.). The categories emerging from grouping these meaning units are mutually exclusive and embody ways of experiencing as conveyed in more than one interview (Larsson & Holmström, 2007, p. 56). Here, the units of meaning or meaning units are specifically conceptions which refer to the phenomenon of interest (Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013, p. 249). In continuation, the structural relations within an outcome space are usually represented in terms of a hierarchical order where categories further up in the order include the ones before them (Larsson & Holmström, 2007, p. 56; Yates et al., 2012, p. 107). In that manner, the outcome space details the different ways of experiencing that one phenomenon. These conceptions identified from the data are then not explicitly recognised as individual qualities but rather as categories of description that can be substituted across different contexts and yet hold meaning (Marton, 1981, p. 177). Even so, it is still regarded as one of the most poorly understood

features of phenomenography (Åkerlind, 2005, p. 322). This concludes the basic structure for a phenomenographic approach to qualitative research.

There are a few concerns outlined in the available literature that pertain to the viability of phenomenography as a research methodology. For one, the manner in which a phenomenon is introduced while conducting research interviews forms the basis for a presupposition or guiding notion that could essentially affect the outcome of the research (Ashworth & Lucas, 1998, p. 427). In that, the extent of the role of the researcher as a co-constructor of knowledge as referenced earlier may be viewed as a possible drawback of the method (Sin, 2010, p. 313). For another, the structuring of the outcome space based on a hierarchical order may lead to undue emphasis on a particular category of description thereby undermining the relevance of other lower categories (Ashworth & Lucas, 1998, p. 429). Furthermore, there are some inconsistencies in framing how phenomenographic research is established. For example, Green (2005) writes that the structure does not hinge on the context of the research situation as a way to derive meaning (p. 34). This is in contrast to Sin's (2010) understanding that contextual aspects are crucial for the analytical stage of the research process (p. 314). The acknowledgement of these issues herewith institutes the sense of care with which to approach phenomenographic research.

This section broadly set up the phenomenographic research process by outlining various perspectives on the subject, even briefly touching upon its analytical aspect. The next section entails a more in-depth exploration of the process of analysis to be used in the study.

3.2 Analytical approach

The manner in which analysis in phenomenography is undertaken informs the nature of the findings and determines the extent to which the research question is realised. In relation to that, this section aims to outline the precise methods to be used in the phenomenographic analysis of the data based on the research question.

The generic frame of analysis for this study, incorporating an inductive approach, is developed herewith. Broadly, analysis can be viewed as being an inductive or deductive process (Elo et al., 2014, p. 1; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 109; Forman & Damschroder, 2008, p. 44). Both of which can be roughly divided into three phases, "immersion, reduction, and interpretation" (Forman & Damschroder, 2008, p. 46). Subscribing to Forman and Damschroder's

(2008) frame, the immersion stage primarily involves making sense of the data, essentially, through repeated readings of the transcripts (p. 47). The following stage entails the deconstruction of data and the organisation of the remaining essential data into categories meant to address the research question (ibid., p. 48). The final stage tends to the reorganisation of the data so as to facilitate the emphasis of key results, development of descriptive and interpretive reviews and the formation of conclusions (ibid., p. 56). How inductive or deductive the approach to analysis is, is defined by the manner in which these processes are undertaken. The approach is also dependent on the depth and extent of the conceptual framework of the study (Forman & Damschroder, 2008, p. 44; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1279). Hsieh and Shannon's (2005) study notes that an inductive approach is used when the theoretical basis for the phenomenon of interest is limited (p. 1271), whereas a deductive approach is more suited to research topics that have extensive theoretical backing (p. 1281). Given that prior research on the phenomenon in question is limited and also dated, referencing section 2.5, the utility of an inductive style of analysis appeared to be crucial to the development of this study. Plus, phenomenography adheres to an inductive approach that is grounded in the data (Green, 2005, p. 35), which is representative of a hermeneutic style of textual analysis (Dortins, 2002, p. 212). Therefore, maintaining the nature of phenomenographic analysis, an inductive approach was established as the primary systematic process in sorting and analysing the accumulated data. A concern around using an inductive approach is regarding the complexity of developing various theoretical associations on the basis of the findings (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1281). In this respect, it cannot be discounted that many aspects of this study such as data collection and management were, in part, informed by the interpretation and understanding of previous studies. Therefore, there is an existing base for inferring the theoretical relevance of the findings. This structure, directed at an inductive analysis, was further modified with respect to the structure for phenomenographic analysis.

Phenomenographic analysis was adopted within the structure referenced in Forman and Damschroder (2008), that is, immersion, reduction and interpretation (p. 46). The initial step in phenomenographic analysis, as established in section 3.1, is familiarisation with the data, which corresponds with the immersion phase (Forman & Damschroder, 2008, p. 46). Following this, meaning units are identified and separated from the irrelevant parts of the interview transcripts and regrouped in a pool of meaning that consists of all likely relationships with the phenomenon of interest (Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013, p. 249). This is comparable to the first part of the reduction phase that has to do with simplifying the raw data using coding

(Forman & Damschroder, 2008, p. 48). Here, coding is the process by which large data sets can be reduced to manageable aspects that facilitate a better understanding of the data which may not have been possible in the transcript form (ibid.). The extent of success of analysis is dependent to a large extent on the coding process as it influences the nature of the categories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1279). Moving forth, from that pool of meaning, individual meaning units are subjected to a process of differentiation by which they are assigned to specific categories based on their similarities (Marton, 1986, p. 43: cited in Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013, pp. 249-250). The categories, thus formed, are distinguished from one another based on their differences (ibid., p. 250), thereby rendering them mutually exclusive. This last part of the analysis relates to second part of the reduction phase, comprising of further coding of the data into categories representative of wider themes and processes (Forman & Damschroder, 2008, p. 48). The remaining phase, titled interpretation, adds an extra dimension to the analysis in phenomenographic research, constituting its results and discussion stages. The result of a phenomenographic analysis is an outcome space or a collection of categories formed on the basis of critical and distinct aspects (Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013, p. 244). Extending the understanding of the interpretation phase (Forman & Damschroder, 2008, p. 56), those aspects can be detailed and compared in relation to each other and the structure of the outcome space. In the discussion stage, established themes or independent perceptions may be examined against the theoretical framework and the results may be further elaborated on to precisely address the research question.

The implementation of an analytical process in phenomenography is based on a few considerations. One, while determining the categories of description, any preset views or premature conclusions about the nature of those categories should be limited (Yates et al., 2012, p. 104). Two, the focus of the analysis is to be on the collective experience, that is, the transcripts and the resulting categories of description are to be treated as a set and not independent of one another (Yates et al., 2012, p. 104). Three, the analysis should embody an exploration of the variation in meaning across the transcripts and how those emerging meanings are structurally related (Åkerlind, 2005, p. 324; Yates et al., 2012, p. 104). In keeping to these considerations, the study maintains a level of trustworthiness that is critical especially when an inductive approach is used (Elo et al., 2014, p. 2).

The following chapter builds on the data related processes employed in this study.

4 Data collection and analysis

The previous chapters of this study charted the context, aims and theoretical conceptualisations meant to guide, scaffold, organise and evaluate the body of research emerging from the collected data. In contrast, this chapter will focus on detailing how the data was collected and, thereafter, analysed.

4.1 Participants

The selection of participants was an integral part of the research process as it formed the basis for the nature of the data collected. In that sense, it also determined to what degree the research question was addressed. This section looks at how participants were selected considering the objective and theoretical paradigm of the study.

As per Yates et al.'s (2012) study, in phenomenography, participants are selected based on their suitability vis-à-vis the objective of the study, the experience of the phenomenon of interest (p. 103). The emphasis of a phenomenographic study is on the qualitative variations in the way the studied phenomenon is experienced, thus the choice of participants is based on capturing those variations (Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013, p. 247; Green, 2005, p. 35). This sample must also be an appropriate representation of the universe from which it is taken (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 103). Such an understanding essentially contextualises the responses of the participants. It is for these reasons that the literature on phenomenography advocates for a purposive sampling method for the selection of participants on the basis of the researcher's judgement (Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013, p. 247; Green, 2005, p. 35; Yates et al., 2012, p. 103). Within the purposive sampling method there are a few more specific techniques that were used in this study. For one, a maximum variation sample (Green, 2005, p. 35; Marshall, 1996, p. 523) was used to ensure a greater variation in responses. Two, a snowball sampling process was employed where participants suggested other likely candidates who might contribute to the realisation of the objective of the study (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). Aside from deciding who should be sampled, the purposive sampling method addresses the size of the sample and the sites from where that sample is obtained (Elo et al., 2014, p. 4).

The issue of the sample size in phenomenographic research has been discussed widely. According to Yates et al. (2012), an adequate size should be able to gather comprehensive descriptions of people's varying perceptions of the phenomenon being studied (p. 103). To that

extent, one study indicates that anything between fifteen to twenty interviews is the ideal (Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013, p. 247) but another quotes that ten to fifteen is the minimum (Trigwell, 2000, p. 66: cited in Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013, p. 248); while yet another holds up the number at precisely twenty (Larsson & Holmström, p. 56). Yates et al. (2012), in contrast, maintains that there is no predetermined sample size for phenomenographic research (p. 103). While phenomenographic research aims to extensively capture the variation in perceptions, there is no way of discerning the degree of variation recorded prior to the analysis stage (Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013, p. 247) and it is not always viable to continue collecting data until a saturation point is reached (Yates et al., 2012, p. 103). Here, a crucial guiding factor in deciding on a sample size is considering the manageability of the consequent data with respect to analysis (Yates et al., 2012, p. 103). Hence, the sample size of this study was determined based on the need to gather variation in perceptions and the handling of data.

The sample size for this study was limited to ten participants. A total of twelve people agreed to participate in the research process, but the contributions of two of them were limited to the piloting of the study. Therefore, their inputs are not included in this study. The participants were selected on the basis of three critical characteristics: they were employed by an educational NGO working with disadvantaged sections of society, had some experience of working in the NGO sector prior to the time of the interview and were directly or indirectly aiding in the development of school education. While contacting participants, where possible, I avoided taking a top-down approach; that is, contacting the organisation seeking to connect with their members. This was necessary as I wanted to ensure the anonymity of the participants and limit any influence on their responses arising from the organisation's knowledge of their participation. Thus, many of the participants were contacted with the help of mutual connections, while others were referred by the participants themselves. This was helpful as there was a lack of viable connections on my part. In this regard, to meet the required sample size I considered two participants within each organisation. This meant that variation in experiences between members of the same organisation would also be recorded. In all, the set of participants spanned five organisations between two locations in the country. Prior to the establishment of this sample set, the sampling process entailed an accessibility factor as addressed in the convenience sampling method (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). Initially, it was to be limited to just one location, that is, Kolkata. However, to introduce more variation contextually and with regard to the work of NGOs, participants from organisations in New Delhi were included in the study as well. The names of these organisations are not mentioned in the study to ensure the

anonymity of the participants. As for the names of the participants, they have all been replaced by the names of the first ten letters of the Greek alphabet. The name replacement was based on the chronological sequence of the interviews. For example, Alpha was the name assigned to first participant interviewed amongst those included in this study; Beta was the label for the subsequent participant, so on and so forth. In clarification, the names of the participants for the purpose of this study are: Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, Epsilon, Zeta, Eta, Theta, Iota and Kappa.

The broad characteristics of the participants as a group are described herewith. Between them, the period of experience of working in the NGO sector spanned from a few years to over two decades. To that extent, there was not only a wide variation in experiences but also their ages. The age range of the participants was established between early twenties to possibly late seventies. There was a blend of educational qualifications that spanned various subjects, mainly at the bachelor's and master's levels. The presence of a mix of genders in the group of participants allowed for some representation of differing perspectives. Demographically, most of them belonged to the cities of Kolkata and New Delhi. Altogether, there were three vernacular tongues identified within the group. These included the languages of Bengali, Gujarati and Hindi. Additionally, they all could communicate in English.

This section not only provided details of the sampling process but also necessary justifications. The following section explains how data were collected from the above sample.

4.2 The interview process

The nature of qualitative information gathered from research participants is dependent how it is gathered. There are several elements that need to be considered while framing an interview process. It is important to address these elements as an interview is the sole entry point of this study into gaining knowledge of the perceptions and experiences of the participants. Additionally, the manner in which the interview takes form and is regulated is also an issue to be considered. In that respect, this segment deliberates on the structure and procedure of a phenomenographic research interview.

The preparatory stage towards establishing a suitable and smooth interview process entailed the following steps. Keeping to the phenomenographic structure for data collection, prescribing that the format of the interview be semi-structured (Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013, p.

246; Yates et al., 2012, p. 102) and its questions be open-ended in nature (Larsson & Holmström, 2007, p. 56; McIntosh & Morse, 2015, p. 1; Yates et al., 2012, p. 102), the structure and questions of the interview process were constructed. The use of semi-structured interviews permits the researcher to address specific themes as well as delve into the experiences of participants (Rabionet, 2011, p. 564). The initial frame of the interview constituted of several themes that were embodied as questions. These themes were considered based on my own experience with regard to the phenomenon of interest and the readings that I undertook with the purpose of developing this study. At the outset, the aim of structuring the interview was not only to facilitate specific and descriptive responses of how participants related to the phenomenon of interest (Yates et al., 2012, p. 102) but also to ensure that it adhered to a certain time frame. The length of the interview was an important aspect of consideration as it affected the amount of data gathered, thereby impacting the management of data. Therefore, with regard to the manageability factor of data collection as cited in the previous section and the time frame of this study, the time range for an interview was established between thirty to fifty minutes. Taking into account the number of participants selected for this study, it was assumed that the resulting data based on this structure would sufficiently cover the extent of variation in experiential descriptions. Additionally, the technical aspects of the interview process were also considered, such as researcher–participant communication, means of recording the data and the appropriate medium for interviewing.

The technical aspects of the interview process are explained herewith. The communication with participants prior to the interview was carried out either directly via phone calls or text messages or through a mutual contact wherein the participant was unreachable. Prior to the interview, every participant was provided with brief information on the purpose and subject of the study and a prompt to partly help them collect their thoughts in that regard. They were also made aware of their rights as a participant in this research in the form of a document on informed consent. This was then signed by them to indicate their voluntary participation. For participants within the city of Kolkata, the consent document was provided in-person; but for those based in New Delhi, the document was sent via email, which was then signed, digitally scanned and sent back to me. All participants verbally consented to their responses being recorded either on a cellular device or on Skype. Skype, an internet-based application, served as an effective medium in overcoming accessibility issues while preserving, to a great extent, the face-to-face quality of an in-person interview (Hanna, 2012, p. 241). Such is a primary aspect of phenomenographic interviews (Yates et al., 2012, p. 102). While there were other internet-

based applications that facilitated real-time interactions, Skype was the preferred choice as it was a widely known application equipped with a recording feature and its usage as a research medium was previously validated (Hanna, 2012, p. 241). These were the finalised considerations of the interview process which were developed based on conclusions from test interviews.

Before conducting the interviews to be used in this study, various parts of the process were tested. This was done to check the reliability of the questions in eliciting a suitable response from the participant in relation to the research question (Elo et al., 2014, p. 4), determine the time per interview and assess the viability of the technical components. There were two test interviews conducted with two separate persons, who were both directly contacted and provided with similar information on the purpose and subject of the study. The first of them was an in-person interview that lasted close to an hour and a half and was recorded using an application on a cellular device. Noticeably, the interview did not keep to the estimated time frame. This was a consequence of the number of questions included in the questionnaire and certain inefficiencies on my part to regulate and support their process of reflection. It was also difficult for the participant to describe the significance of their work without having thought about it in advance. In consideration of these conclusions, a revised interview plan was derived. Such a plan included fewer questions in the questionnaire and a prompt, to be used prior to the interview, comprised of two basic questions to orient the participant towards thinking about the extent of the significance of their work.

The resultant plan plus an additional technical aspect were tested in an interview with a participant who was established in a different geographical location than my own at the time. The additional technical aspect tested was the medium of Skype. This was done to ascertain the impact of technical glitches (Hanna, 2012, p. 241) on the interaction between the participant and myself. Unlike the previous test interview, where a physical consent form was provided, here it was read out to the participant over Skype as way to reduce any presumable hassle on the part of the participant. However, as the Skype interface showed, the reading of the consent form required further clarifications because of occasional technical glitches. So, for the purpose of that interview the consent was verbalised. For all other subsequent Skype interactions, the consent form was sent beforehand to be read and signed. While there were minor glitches for the rest of the interview, they did not affect the overall nature and flow of the interview. As for the time frame, this interview was relatively shorter but still over the planned time limit. This resulted, again, in the reduction of questions in the final questionnaire but my under-

standing of my position as a researcher had developed substantially. Based on the participant's response, the prompt was limited to a single question pertaining explicitly to the description of the significance of their work. On completion of the test interviews and revision of the interview plan, the ten participants used in the development of this study were interviewed. I chose not to include the findings from the pilot interviews because at the time I was still developing clarity on my own research topic and process, both of which underwent considerable changes following those interviews. All participants were interviewed in the English language, which was not their vernacular tongue. Even so, they primarily responded in English with an occasional switch, mostly a word or a phrase, between English and the vernacular tongues of Hindi and Bengali.

As a researcher, I adhered to the phenomenographic pointers towards acting as a co-constructor of knowledge in the process of data collection. First, I made sure to inform the participants that nature of the interview was inclined towards building a conversational interaction that facilitated reflection (Yates et al., 2012, p. 102). Secondly, I encouraged them to express themselves openly with special regard to the details of specific experiences (Larsson & Holmström, 2007, p. 56). Thirdly, wherever required, I sought clarification, probed their responses further and tried to understand variations and contradictions on their part (Green, 2005, p. 37). Rabionet (2011) suggests that it is useful to have additional questions to probe participants for specific information if and when it does not surface (p. 564). Based on the two test interviews, I had a working understanding of where the experiential descriptions of the participants might be brief and superficial. So, I knew what sort of questions to use to probe them further. Where participants sought clarification from me regarding the questions, I was careful in explaining myself so as to reduce the extent of my influence on their responses. In that regard, I was constantly evaluating my position as a researcher. Broadly, this constituted my role in the interview.

This section discussed the details of eliciting rich and descriptive responses from the participant. The subsequent section looks at how those responses were transcribed and analysed.

4.3 Analysis

This section illustrates in detail how analysis was carried out with regard to the data collected via several interviews. The processes developed herewith were established in alignment with the methodological aspects of the study. The result of sorting and analysing the data through

these processes was represented as an outcome space that consisted of distinct categories directed towards answering the research question. The independent processes of reducing the data into coherent components, as explained in this section, are also presented as a flow chart below.

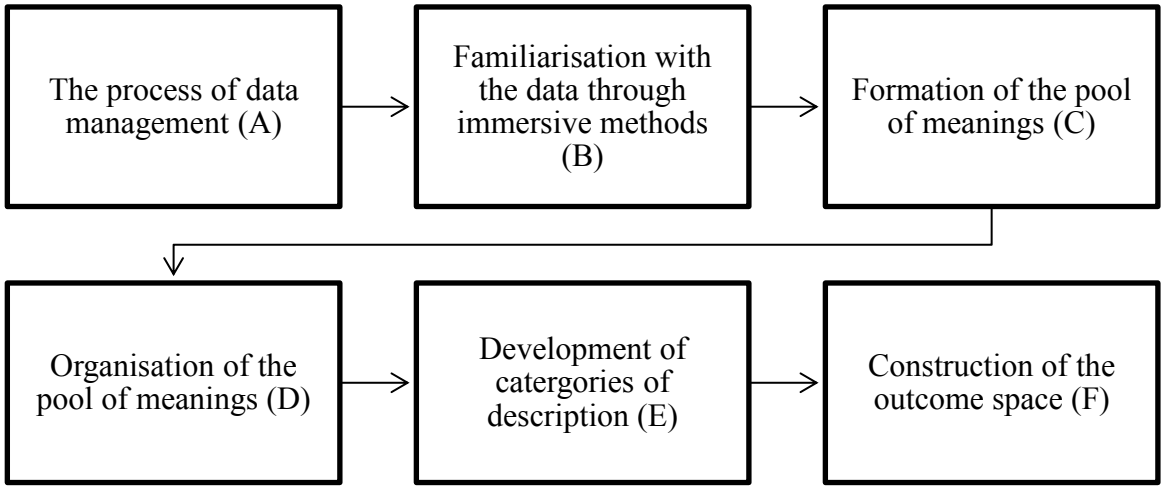

Figure 3. Various processes used within the analytical framework of this study.

The preliminary stage of the analytical framework pertains to that of data management processes (A). Through these processes, the data were stored and prepared in a manner so as to facilitate the course of analysis. To that extent, following the completion of the interviews, the data recorded within the cellular device and the programme of Skype were transferred and downloaded, respectively, to a computer hard drive. Each of the recordings was labelled in the following way: name of participant, name of organisation (date of interview). This, as Forman and Damschroder (2007) indicate, simplifies the process of identifying the source of the data when there are several data sets (p. 45). As per Forman and Damschroder's (ibid.) suggestion, the audio/video recordings were then backed up to prevent any potential loss of data. Subsequently, those recordings were transcribed as textual data to obtain a more manageable form of data to be analysed. As Sin (2010) eloquently puts it, the transcription process, a part of data management, "is the interface between oral and written data" (p. 314). While transcription is viewed explicitly as a data management strategy within the framework cited by Forman and Damschroder (2007, p. 45), it cannot be discounted that in transcribing the oral data I was also simultaneously familiarising myself with the data (B). An aspect that is more pronounced in the phase of immersion following the development of the transcripts.

The transcript forms the initial base for analysing the recorded data (Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013, p. 248); therefore, ensuring its cogency is vital to the analytical process. To that extent, to maintain a consistent structure of transcription a few procedural specificities were established based on prior studies. As a phenomenographic analysis does not share the same focus as discourse analysis on the linguistic features of data, the priority of transcription is to accurately document the spoken word (Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013, p. 248). Adding to that, Bucholtz (2007) points out, where the emphasis of analysis is on discourse content and not structure, structural elements such as "prosody, pauses, repairs or hesitation markers" are often absent in transcripts (pp. 786-787). Such is relevant to phenomenography, as its focus is on the informational content or the conceptual meanings embedded within the expressions of the research participants (Sin, 2010, p. 314). To that extent, the transcription process undertaken in this study laid emphasis on the development of the spoken word as textual data. However, where elements of speech, such as a tonal inflection, were critical to the description of their conceptions, they were documented in the transcript. A more particular consideration with regard to the structure of speech concerns that of its grammatical elements. According to Oliver et al. (2005), the likely convention is to document it verbatim (p. 1285) and so this study largely adheres to it. Also, given that several participants were not overtly confident about expressing themselves in the English language and some occasionally even switched between it and other vernacular mediums, the transcription of the oral data was subject to due deliberation in said regard. Where translation was required, I prioritised the representation of the meaning of their expressions over reducing the structural change between languages. This directs the attention of the discussion to that of the scope of error in transcription. Errors can manifest in terms of technicalities or human inefficiencies (Oliver et al., 2005, p. 1281). While technical issues were visibly evident, errors on my part in transcription were less so. To address those errors, the transcribed documents were often revised against the recordings. Despite the care taken to rectify errors in transcription, it is likely that a few still remained.

In the transcription process, critical measures were taken to protect the identity of the participants of this study. That is, along with their names, explicit references to their workplace, colleagues and other personal details that may lead to their identification were also removed from the results. Their names, as mentioned in section 4.1, were replaced by other titles. Other personal details were replaced by more general terms while retaining the overall meaning associated with those details. For instance, if an organisation was cited by name, it was replaced with the word, 'organisation'.

Once the transcripts were developed, I further familiarised myself with the data (B) by engaging in several iterative readings of the set of them. Through these readings I was able to establish a critical sense of the data by building on the familiarity I had gained in their regard during the process of transcription. Specifically, these readings helped me understand how every transcript was part of a wider data set and, therein, make observations between transcripts and my own understanding. The observations pertained to recognising what might constitute as essential or nonessential information with respect to the research question. To that extent, during the first set of readings, I used the technique of "memoing" (Forman & Damschroder, 2007, p. 47), which is embodied in writing short notes or descriptions to make sense of the data. For example, while reading a particular transcript if I thought it provided context to a certain perception of interest or if it offered insight into another aspect of the data, I noted it as such. Here, the aim was to possibly develop points of entry into the data that facilitated a better understanding of what they entailed. Following this process of familiarisation with the data (B), a part of the immersive phase, a preliminary coding process was utilised in the formation of the pool of meaning (C).

As per phenomenographic guidelines, the pool of meaning was formed (C) on the basis of isolation of the meaning units from the transcripts. Again, here, an iterative and reflective reading process was employed in analysing the annotated transcripts. All descriptions that pertained to the experience of the phenomenon of interest, that is, the significance of work, were tagged as such. Once all the transcripts were analysed and their respective excerpts containing the meaning units tagged, an overall review was carried out to ensure no relevant perceptions remained unidentified. Next, in accordance with section 3.3, just the excerpts with the meaning units were retained within the transcripts and all other data that did not bear any relation to the significance of work were removed. These meaning units were then grouped together within a single document; therein, forming the pool of meaning (C). This shifted the base of analysis from individual transcripts to that of the pool of meaning (Marton, 1986: cited in Åkerlind, 2005, p. 325).

The process of organisation of the meaning units of experience within the pool of meaning (D) is elaborated in this paragraph. The perceptions within the pool of meaning were read repeatedly. In this regard, following Collier-Reed and Ingerman's (2013) approach, each perception or meaning unit was viewed in terms of its place in the pool of meaning as well as the transcript from which it was obtained (p. 250). Each meaning unit was used as a reference to distinguish and relate to other meaning units within the pool of meaning, as given in their

study (ibid.). By engaging in this reading pattern, I was able to see both common and contrasting themes emerge within the pool of meaning. These themes were relatable between transcripts, showcasing the variety and similarity between them. Therein, I began to code the meaning units with keywords that were representative of broader themes. For example, there were different types of empowerment cited with respect to the significance of work; thus, the keyword I attached to those meaning units was 'empowerment' that symbolised a more general theme of the same name. Through this iterative assessment of the pool of meaning I was able to appreciate the general notion in phenomenographic research that meaning and structure are co-constituted (Åkerlind, 2005, p. 325). Once, close to all meaning units were coded, I commenced the process of categorisation of those meaning units (E) based on their embodied commonalities. The resulting categories were based on a temporary understanding and were evaluated against the composition of their meaning units and against those within other categories. As quoted in Collier-Reed and Ingerman's (2013) study, often, portions of a category or even an entire category had to be reconsidered to identify and develop defining components and relationships both within and between categories relating to a particular theme (p. 250). This was done to validate and substantiate the establishment of categories (Åkerlind, 2005, p. 325). This process of constituting and reconstituting the categories continued until a relatively stable and distinct categorisation was achieved (E). In that, the labels assigned to several of the categories underwent changes so as to clearly emphasise the contents of the categories. This labelling procedure was also informed by the identification of the distinguishing similarity of meaning units belonging to a particular category with regard to those in other categories. This constituted the set up of the first level categories of description (E).

The categories derived through the process explained above were subjected to further categorisation (E). The formation of these categories was based on inferences of how different sets of categories at the first level were commonly aligned to a more inclusive theme. Therein, they were also linked to one another. This was emblematic of a hierarchical relationship. Once all the first level categories were grouped within a higher level category, the place of each first level category within their new grouping structure was evaluated against their meaning units. Again, here, there was regrouping to ensure a definitive fit within the higher level category. Altogether, these higher level categories made up the second level categories of description. The naming of categories at this level was informed by both a prior knowledge of the significance of work and an inferred understanding of the sets of categories. These categories further subscribed to two distinct themes as was evidenced by their composition. Based

on this, the second level categories were grouped within the third level categories (E). The names of these categories clearly emerged from the overarching emphases on the ways of experiencing the significance of work.

Following the institution of each of the categories at different levels, they were inputted within a structural frame. This frame was developed based on logical relationships between categories within the same level and hierarchical relationships between categories of different levels. It emphasised their position with regard to the categories within their respective level and those in other levels. It was reviewed that the categories within each level of this frame were mutually exclusive. Each category was symbolic of a way of experiencing the significance of work. Altogether, adhering to the analytical guidelines of phenomenographic research (Åkerlind, 2005, p. 323; Yates et al., 2012, p. 107), the frame thus established was comprised of the fewest possible set of categories that explicated the critical variation in perceptions as identified in the data. In this manner, the outcome space, as given below (Table 1), was formed (F).

Table 1. The outcome space

<table>
<tr><th>1st level of categories (number)</th><th>2nd level of categories</th><th>3rd level of categories</th><th>Outcome space</th></tr>
<tr><td>3</td><td>Stability</td><td rowspan="3">Personal significance</td><td rowspan="8">Perceptions, details of experiences and associated meanings of the significance of work.</td></tr>
<tr><td>4</td><td>Intrinsic satisfaction</td></tr>
<tr><td>2</td><td>Implicit effect</td></tr>
<tr><td>2</td><td>Relational depth</td><td rowspan="4">Professional significance</td></tr>
<tr><td>3</td><td>Positional influence</td></tr>
<tr><td>2</td><td>Systemic impact</td></tr>
<tr><td>3</td><td>Externality</td></tr>
</table>

This section developed how the data underwent changes from its raw state of audio/video recordings to being represented within the outcome space. The following chapter explores the components of the outcome space further.

5 Findings

There are some considerations with regard to the presentation of the findings. Throughout the presentation of the findings, participants or their mentions of other people are referred to in gender neutral terms, such as they and their, as an attempt to further protect the details of participants. Although, where gender was central to a perception, it was presented as such. There were two notational modifications made within some direct quotations. An ellipsis or … was used to denote omitted text and square brackets or [] were used to input explanatory information. Additionally, direct quotations were mainly used to demonstrate how a particular category differed from another (Yates et al., 2012, p. 106).

5.1 Personal significance

Personal significance is one of two categories informing the outcome space about the significance of work. In that regard, this section describes its composition as a third level category. Mainly, it focuses on the similarities and differences found between the three second level categories that constitute its association with work.

Table 2. Personal significance

1st level of categories	2nd level of categories	
Measure of convenience	Stability	Personal significance
Basis for empowerment		
State of mind		
Ideological alignment	Intrinsic satisfaction	
Sense of purpose		
Personal development		
Regard for process		
Distribution of time	Implicit effect	
Implication of work knowledge		

5.1.1 Stability

The development of an individual's career is seemingly dependent on how they perceive their sense of stability with respect to work. The perceptions around stability illustrated work as a place of convenience, a foundation for social and economic development and a critical part of maintaining a balanced emotional state. Furthermore, as identified within the perceptions, the influence of familial factors was critical to the overall establishment of stability in the participant's work life be it in terms of generic independence or an emotional state. These perceptions were broadly grouped together within the following first level categories: *Measure of convenience*, *Basis for empowerment* and *State of mind*. Each of which contributes to the place of work in providing a reliable and sustainable constitution in the lives of the participants. In that respect, the extent of the perceptions pertaining to *Measure of convenience* was relatively less.

The *Measure of convenience* outlines perceptions of NGO professionals that assess work in terms of ease of employability, security and familiarity. These come under the umbrella of convenience as they were used to refer to work as being favourable to the distinct situations of participants. All of these features pointed to the notion of reliability, but only the latter two were linked to constancy, both of which are key terms for stability. These features, as implied in the quote below, were expressed to have impacted their choice of work and subsequent association with that work or even the development of their career. Furthermore, the understanding that the impression of familiarity is built on the basis of consistency, a key aspect of stability, is clearly established in the quote below.

> *I knew this organisation since 2012, and I'm participating in many programmes organised by this NGO since 2014. I have currently joined here in 2019. (Zeta, Measure of convenience)*

While both *Measure of convenience* and *Basis for empowerment* address the respective situation of participants, the latter develops work as the foundation of their state of independence, especially in relation to their family background. The influence of a family varied from strict restrictions to milder factors such as conditions and recommendations concerning the choice of work. Specifically, the significance of work within the *Basis for empowerment* category was linked to social and economic independence, gender empowerment and the development of familial prominence. With respect to limiting circumstances, the participants have acknowledged the place of work in enabling feelings of empowerment, independence and

influence within their family. In that, they point to the enabling factor of their work. Additionally, Theta's position, given below, also suggests that circumstances in relation to her agency are more balanced at present than they were in the past.

> *I feel more confident and mature managing things at home, sharing my point. And I play the biggest part at my home in any small and big decision. I was not even allowed to wear jeans and go out. I did not get tuitions because for that I had to go out, at that time this was like that. And now [after starting work] I can go whenever I want, I can travel out of the city, no one questions because they have that trust. (Theta, Basis for empowerment)*

Such instances, however, as talked about by the participants, were characteristic of certain family backgrounds, as was the discussion around the issue of significant income. As reflected in the data, the notion of earning well, a sign of financial stability, was synonymous with having established a certain level of steadiness in life (Iota). To that extent, of the three first level categories in this subsection, there was a consistent and extensive reference to *Basis for empowerment* as a significant outcome of work. The broader outcome of work, that is, *Stability*, can also be understood in relation to the category of *State of mind*. This category was framed based on its emphasis on the mental health of the participants and not their situational states; thereby, distinguishing it from the previous two categories in this subsection.

The *State of mind* entails perceptions of the linkages between work and the emotional and mental states of the participants highlighting feelings of optimism, joy, contentment and productivity. Despite the perception that working at an NGO was comparable to a hectic process, overall, the perceptions were symptomatic of constructive emotional health. There was also mention of the input of work in improving emotional well-being. As in the following quote, the participant depicts the shift in their state of mind, through work, that possibly helped establish some stability in their life.

> *I was in a part of my life where I was not very happy… I just came here [the organisation] to spend some time. I went through a personal trauma… So then I didn't know how to cope up with this situation. Then, my chairperson got me here… Then, this gave me a lot of contentment and happiness. (Kappa, State of mind)*

As represented here, the understanding of stability as experienced by the participants was embedded in the descriptions of their emotional and situational states. The three first level cate-

gories of description together determine the quotient of stability that is afforded by an individual in relation to their work.

5.1.2 Intrinsic satisfaction

This category, in contrast to *Stability*, outlines how participants conceptualised inherent satisfaction with respect to the match between their work and their personal attributes. The distinguishing element being personal attributes. It puts into perspective how individuals identify with their work as a way to realise their internal sense of self. Such is detailed in the four first level categories within this subsection (Table 2). These categories address some deeper meanings of work such as preferred ideological stance, derivation of purpose, development of the self and an inherent connection with the work process. They are developed, respectively, in the categories entitled in the following manner: *Ideological alignment*, *Sense of purpose*, *Personal development* and *Regard for process*.

The category of *Ideological alignment* encompasses perceptions of the realisation of personal ideologies through the work of NGOs. The extent of the match between personal ideology and the philosophy of an establishment was expressed as a decisive factor in an individual's judgement of their fit in an organisation. Work, to the participants, was understood as a means to realise and implement personal conceptions of education around improving human capabilities and increasing overall awareness. This was seen to provide an inherent sense of meaning and fulfilment at the personal level. These ideologies, as talked about by the participants, were the result of family background, personal experience, state of politics and regard for eminent social figures. They were considered guiding principles that informed not only their view on the process of education but also the nature of their work. The notion of giving to society, as portrayed below, was also addressed by other participants as well. The expression points to specific kind of work–ideology relationship. That is, a link where the ideology was influenced by an external source.

> *You see one picture here [pointing to a picture of Swami Vivekananda, an Indian monk and philosopher]… he wrote a very powerful line, that I consider every man a traitor who having been brought up or educated at the expense of the poor are not doing anything to give back to them, to society. So I think that has also somewhere been a guiding principle for me. (Alpha, Ideological alignment)*

Following the compilation of ideological positions, the category of *Sense of purpose* was established. The perceptions in this category addressed what it meant to be an educational professional and how that understanding was developed. These perceptions were primarily based on personal experiences. While the ideological meanings attached to work framed the relevance of individual philosophies, the descriptions within *Sense of purpose* gave shape to the development of the trajectories of the lives of the participants through their work. Again, here, as with the previous category, there was an inward disposition, maybe in connection to satisfaction, towards conducting one's self on a path that held more meaning.

> *You realise that, am I going to kind of waste the rest of my life teaching rich kids who already have so much or shouldn't I do what I can do with my limited time and experiences or whatever I have to do something for the poor. (Alpha, Sense of purpose)*

Like the aforementioned participant, many identified their sense of purpose as working for the betterment of children from disadvantaged fractions of society. Such a sense of purpose was also stated to have been derived from the Constitution of India, a document that defines education as a fundamental right (Zeta). Again, comparable to Alpha's description, participants also posited that they reassessed the directional input of their efforts in relation to the sense of purpose. While a sense of purpose was widely referenced as a steady aspect of the perception of work, there was mention of change. To that extent, the understanding of purpose was expressed to evolve from being centred on the research participant to being responsible for the influence on other stakeholders in the educational process (Beta). Therein, meaningfulness of work was established in relation to aspects beyond the self.

The category of *Personal development* was explicitly established based on similar experiences of participants wherein their work contributed to their individual growth. In that respect, the data outlined a variety of perceptions. There were descriptions of personal growth linked to exposure gained during travel assignments (Beta), changes in personality traits as a consequence of communal interaction (Iota) and attitude development based on periodic experiences (Eta). Below, the element of self-realisation, a form of personal development with regard to attitude in the workplace, played a critical role in developing the participant's sense of self or identity. This development of the sense of identity as an embodiment of personal development was a commonly referenced thought. The following excerpt also points to the detail that intrinsic change was achieved in the present organisation and not the previous one. Thereby, a

participant's personal significance of their present work was established in relation to their earlier place of work.

> *In the last organisation, I kind of do the things which I think I don't need anyone's support for and I can easily do it. But here [the present organisation], I realised that asking for support, is, like, kind of helped me a lot. That attitude has also changed from not reaching out to anyone to reaching out to people happily. (Delta, Personal development)*

The category of *Personal development* was distinguished from the previous categories of this subsection in the following manner. To begin with, *Personal development* strictly dealt with experiences of individual growth at the place of work, whereas the previous two categories were formed on the basis of ideological inclinations and work as a source of innate purpose. For the next category, *Regard for process*, the point of departure from *Personal development*, as well as the other categories in this subsection, was its emphasis on the respect for the procedures employed at NGOs that were sincere, meticulous and enabling in nature. Although explicitly different, all of these categories were depicted to affect others within its group. For example, *Personal development* was closely associated with processes that facilitated it.

The category of *Regard for process* underscores the sense of inward contentment that participants derived from taking part in such processes. Especially, as the quotation below explains, because work processes in the NGO sector were perceived to be inherently dissimilar to the more commonly established routines. It was also merited with having the space where participants felt their work was open to any type of direction, pointing to the exploratory quality of NGO processes both in terms of work as well as the self.

> *There is kind of a freedom from other kind of bureaucratic job or other job that demands lot of protocols, a lot bureaucratic things, but here, if you genuinely want to do something you can do lot of experiments. (Eta, Regard for process)*

This flexibility in the structure of NGO processes was repeatedly talked about in conceptualising the significance of work. It was highly regarded as it represented the autonomy to undertake one's own projects and develop one's work without the influence of rigid and imposing structures. In comparing two work processes, the above quotation was able to put into perspective the critical qualities of those within NGOs.

The meaningfulness that was embodied in the representation of intrinsic satisfaction constituted a wide variety of perceptions that addressed several layers of contentment associated with work.

5.1.3 Implicit effect

As the name suggests, this category entails perceptions of the effects of work which, at the outset, are often unanticipated when thinking about the choice of work. This also formed the basis for the construction of the category. The significance of work depicted in this category was the result of either varying circumstances at work or the influence of knowledge gained there. In that respect, the two first level categories that make up this second level category are: *Distribution of time* and *Implication of work knowledge*.

The category of *Distribution of time* contains perceptions of how work affected the time for various personal aspects and processes in the lives of the participants. The responses of participants explained how demarcations between work and life were blurred while trying to meet the needs of work. This was perceived to affect both the personal and social aspects of their lives in a negative manner. For example, being overworked was expressed to have impacted their sleep cycles, which were often shortened (Beta). Also, jobs that demanded longer working hours drastically reduced the time they allocated for friends, family and themselves. Moreover, the reduction in family time due to the consuming state of their work caused strain in the relationships between participants and their family members (Iota). The uncompromising effects of the nature of NGO work, as developed herewith, and its implied role in impacting the time meant for one's family is exemplified in the following citation.

> *This kind of work demands huge time. And it's not like you have to just work from ten to five. It affects family life, you know, I can't spend much time with family, my son. That is very challenging. (Eta, Distribution of time)*

The *Implication of work knowledge*, as implied by the name itself, was framed in relation to how participants described the utility of their work knowledge in their personal lives. To that extent, while perceptions within the category of *Distribution of time* developed the impact of work on the time available in the personal lives of participants, that of *Implication of work knowledge* focuses on how work knowledge impacts the daily choices and interactions in their

personal sphere. For example, the extract given below points to the implicit result of the participant's professional expertise influencing their interactions outside the sphere of their work.

> *Whatever practices I am doing here, I want to circulate it in every sphere of my life… There are little children opposite my house, now I am working more with the early childhood education, so I am observing the children and trying to give more appropriate inputs so that their development is much more scientific. (Beta, Implication of work knowledge)*

This instance outlined two key personal outcomes of doing developmental work at an NGO. One, how pervasive an NGO professional's work can be in their life. Two, the learning from their place of work serves as a base to impact change outside of their professional space.

5.2 Professional significance

In contrast to the previous section, this one outlines the significance work as experienced explicitly within the professional sphere. As given below (Table 3), the category of *Professional significance* is developed in relation to four distinct second level categories of description.

Table 3. Professional significance

1st level of categories	2nd level of categories	
Shared space	Relational depth	Professional significance
Meaningful relationships		
Power to effect change	Positional influence	
Place in the organisation		
Relevance in society		
Community development	Systemic impact	
State of education		
Blended identity	Externality	
Source of appreciation		
Establishment recognition		

5.2.1 Relational depth

The emphasis of the category of *Relational depth* is on how individuals draw significance from their interactions or sense of collegiality with regard to their work. This category entails descriptions of the significance of work that broadly outlined various aspects of organisational culture and the nature of relationships. These aspects were divided, respectively, between the first level categories entitled *Shared space* and *Meaningful relationships*. As this section will illustrate, these two categories develop the meaningfulness that participants associated with the social sphere at their place of work. To that extent, the division of *Shared space* is a relevant point of entry into understanding the more general aspects of the relational framework at the workplace.

As a first level category, *Shared space* was developed based on the several perceptions that put forth the sensitive nature of their respective organisational spaces. More specifically, some of these quotations addressed elements of closeness, comfort, mutual cooperation and support with respect to developing a sense of belonging within that space. Such a sense of belonging was felt so acutely by some participants that they compared the space within their organisation with that of a family's. The next quote brings out the deep relational significance that the participant associated with their place of work.

> *I think more of this organisation as my home than my home itself. (Kappa, Shared space)*

The category of *Meaningful relationships*, in contrast to the one before it, focuses on the place of specific relationships in the participants' conceptions of their work as compared to the overall social atmosphere. This category encompasses perceptions of relationships participants developed at work that have had a significant impact on them. The importance of one of such relationship is given below. It suggests the kind of guiding, nurturing and facilitative impact a well-established relationship can have on an individual. This possibly clarifies the place of this category within that of *Relational depth*. Furthermore, the implied common link between two people, as per the quote below, was also cited by other participants as an essential factor in finding meaning within relationships. As the quote shows, through meaningful relationships the journey of work becomes a shared venture.

> *He [their boss] has had that journey of becoming an entrepreneur, and I myself am on that journey of becoming an entrepreneur, so he actually helps me a lot. I have a lot of*

questions, how to do what, how to start, where to go, whom to talk to, so he is always there to guide me every time. I think that is one really special relationship I have at work. (Iota, Meaningful relationships)

As embodied in the quote above, there was a deep relational bond between participants and their work established through such relationships. Or, as in the case of the previous category, it was developed through a safe and sociable space. In that respect, this subsection brought out the value of social connection in the professional lives of the participants.

5.2.2 Positional influence

This category emerged as a result of the commonalities in the perceived relevance of the position of participants in association with their organisation. While the previous category in its group focussed explicitly on dynamics of social relations within the organisation, this looks at conceptions around efficacy and importance at the organisational and societal levels. These conceptions were expressed within three more specific categories: *Power to effect change*, *Place in the organisation* and *Relevance in society*. These three titles, respectively, consist of descriptions pertaining to a participant's assessment of their work based on their ability to impact change in the education sector, position to contribute within their organisation and the societal value of their choice and manner of work.

The perceptions within *Power to effect change* depict how participants anticipated their role, both as part of an NGO and as an individual actor, in driving a change within the education sector. NGOs were perceived by the participants as a key catalyst in social transformative processes such as that of education (Zeta). Particularly, these perceptions addressed the facilitative potency of NGOs in terms of concerns around bridging the gap between communities (Iota), limiting oppression and ensuring human rights (Zeta). Altogether, participants, in relation to their organisation and others, strongly attributed being part of a process that was structured to create a definite impact. The ensuing quote typifies the kind of undertanding participants had of their facility to establish a change in the field of their work.

We have chosen a very small part of a very big unsolvable problem… Different organisations are tackling very, very, very small parts of the problems and actually bringing change. Because you can't solve education in one go. A lot of organisations are only, only, only working on nutrition, only, only working on teacher education and I think

that is very important. That specificity, that focus, gives a more directed impact and hence the change. (Iota, Power to effect change)

The category of *Place in the organisation*, in contrast to the previous one, explores influence and importance solely in terms of the individual as viewed within the organisational structure. The range of participants in this study, that included employees at different hierarchical levels, addressed aspects of influence as perceived from their level in the organisation. In that regard, they described their control over the nature of the processes at work (Alpha), specific responsibilities in relation to their position (Epsilon) and the extent of their authority in consideration of the others employed by their organisation (Iota). In the extract below, participants expressed concern around how their knowledge and influence relative to their colleagues were tested, therein, it affected the balance of inputs and development of their work. It is perhaps also indicative of how participants assessed their importance in the organisation.

I understand that newcomers are also bringing new knowledge, new understanding, but that doesn't mean that old understanding or prior experience is not good enough to be heard about, so, yes, that sometimes creates controversies that the old beliefs and the new beliefs, the way of working, it sometimes create little disturbance… It challenges my position, for example, if I'm working in a content team and I create content but if somebody who doesn't have any experience in content building comes and comments on my work so that really offends me. (Epsilon, Place in the organisation)

The next category within *Positional influence* is that of *Relevance in society*. This was distinguished from the previous divisions in this second level category based on descriptions that were representative of nominal influence and the place of participants within the broader framework of society. Unlike the other divisions, it does not focus on the individual or organisational capacity to drive change but merely on an individual's standing as an NGO professional in society. In that regard, this category encapsulated descriptions of perceived societal respect for NGO professionals working in the developmental sector (Beta), therein, underlining the notion nominal influence. Additionally, within the purview of society, there were perceptions of being part of a collective from which participants drew meaning of their work. In that, there was an implicit responsibility that the participant, referenced below, felt in relation to their duties as a citizen within a particular society. It conceivably brought out their independent and positional bearing on their society, but more generally, on their country.

A professional's work also helps the fulfilment of the social commitment of a particular professional. I have some social commitments as a citizen, as a professional, so that also can be done through work... I have my fundamental duties for the country. So, maybe, I'm serving my country, I mean, like I'm doing my fundamental duties through my work. (Zeta, Relevance in society)

This extract exemplifies a part of the understanding of participants of their role and relevance with regard to their work. It shows, like descriptions from other categories in this subsection, how participants see themselves in a position to effect change. These descriptions of effecting possible change broadly developed the significance of work in terms of the participants' perceived sense of influence with regard to their placement in an NGO.

5.2.3 Systemic impact

The category of *Systemic impact* directly follows from that of *Positional influence*. The distinction, between the two, is that the latter focussed on participants' perceptions of how they might be able to influence change and the former focuses on the details of instances of where change was already established through their work. Thereby, also inherently differing from that of *Relational depth*, where the overarching theme was social connection. The perceptions of participants concerning the established impact of their work were developed in relation to two first level categories. These were termed *Community development* and *State of education*. Together, these categories entailed descriptions that spoke to how participants observed the noticeable effects of their contribution on the people and systems they were trying to impact.

The state of a community, in essence, forms the context of the educational process, thus its development is considered a critical area of work in the education sector. The category of *Community development* covers a variety of perceptions that prove the extent of development achieved in several disenfranchised sections of society. The impact of community development strategies was perceived most distinguishably in relation to women and children. Participants, like the one below, stated that because of their work and guidance, women were empowered members of their own households. This, as they elaborated further, also helped their children's educational growth. They were clear in describing how their work empowered mothers in disadvantaged households to facilitate the learning capacities of their children. Through their help and the provision of resources, participants witnessed the mothers of those children become a central figure in their child's learning experience in the preschool stage.

This not only developed both the position of the mothers and the learning curves of their children, but also enhanced the relationship between the two. All these aspects, perceptibly stated in the succeeding quote, emphasise how individual household units within specific communities have profited from the work of NGOs.

> *I have heard many anecdotes from the field that the parents say that my child always used to roam around, be on her father's mobile phone, or watch stupid cartoons on TV. But now, as soon as I take out this activity book, she's there and she really wants to do it, she enjoys doing it. I have also seen many children, who earlier used to not even listen to their mothers, because the children don't see the mothers as authoritative, they are scared of their fathers but not the mother. But now, the child is also expecting that the mother would also teach me something, I could learn something; I could do something with her. (Iota, Community development)*

The category of *Community development* looked at the impact of the work of NGOs within disadvantaged communities, whereas that of *State of education* draws attention to the impact within the education system. The latter category entails descriptions of how participants saw their intervention to have contributed to increasing educational access (Eta), reforming educational practices (Gamma) and ensuring quality education (Zeta). These perceptions illustrated educational strategies that were already in implementation or instances of impact apropos the state of education. The leading emphasis lay on the instances of transparent impact on the state of education. In this regard, conceptions were widely and variably referenced. The impact of the work of NGOs was most pronounced in relation to their contribution towards the development of the public school system. The following citation signifies the clarity of the participant in seeing the systemic significance of their work in education and the kind of change that is established through linkages between NGOs and government systems.

> *We were working with government school teachers… initially we have seen many teachers, as if they were bound to come to the workshops and meetings and discussions, they were not very willing to work in their schools as discussed in the workshops and all. But gradually, I have seen serious changes in them, they are very motivated now, they are working with enthusiasm with the children, I'm just talking about this particular project, so it's very visible. (Zeta, State of education)*

The above citation also points to what the government school teachers' response was to the work of the NGO. It was established in the form of an unwillingness to take heed of the ef-

forts of the NGO. Despite that reluctance, over time, the NGO was able to get through to them, therein showing the depth of their impact. Such was the degree of impact recorded in the descriptions of the participants with respect to communities and education systems.

5.2.4 Externality

This subsection elaborates on the category termed as *Externality*. It consists of perceptions of the consequences of work that were broadly unintended or secondary to the perceived nature of the work of NGOs. In clarification, descriptions within the categories of *Intrinsic satisfaction* or *Positional influence* emphasise the close considerations of what work entailed; here, the emphasis lies on the inherent lack of consideration of what was entailed in partaking in work. This is the distinguishing element of this category in comparison to the other second level categories in this section. Accordingly, it establishes the significance of work as a derivative of a more general significance associated with working in an NGO. In this regard, the extent of perceptions within this category was relatively limited as was the variation between perceptions. This category includes descriptions of merged identities and reception of acknowledgment and recognition in relation to the participants and their organisations. These descriptions are split between the first level categories of *Blended identity*, *Source of appreciation* and *Establishment recognition*.

The category of *Blended identity* was formed on the basis of perceptions that put forth a sense of unification of personal and professional identities. This category was developed within the broader theme of professional significance as it represented how deeply participants identified themselves as professionals with regard to their place and area of work. To that extent, participants perceived their identity to belong to their organisation (Eta) and, conversely, the organisation as an extension of themselves (Kappa). Such a level of identification, as some participants claimed, was linked to their long association with a particular organisation or, more generally, their area of work. The quote below suggests the formation of a mixed identity as an inadvertent effect of a prolonged attachment to the workplace.

> *It happens that, you know, you're so long with an organisation, I think your identities, there is a problem. A lot of the professional gets personal; a lot of the personal gets professional. There's an issue. (Alpha, Blended identity)*

As a consequence of their association with an NGO, participants experienced situations wherein their general quality of work or specific contribution was appreciated. Unlike the previous category that approached the concept of externality through the lens of identity, the focus here, *Source of appreciation*, is to understand the various ways in which the outcome of their work was accompanied with external appreciation. In that regard, the range of responses expressed receiving little or no external appreciation concerning their work to being appreciated on a daily basis for their inputs. This appreciation was mostly shown in the form of social rewards such as expressions of gratitude or praise for their work (Zeta). Despite the presence of appreciation in their line of work, participants were clear in expressing that appreciation was not an inherent aspect of concern in their work. In view of that, the next quotation points to the emergence of appreciation being an externality as it was not a planned effect.

> *You know, one is not really working on appreciation… As a matter of fact, when a child does well, that is the appreciation that we get. Nobody says thank you for anything because that has never been a part of or consideration for any work we have done. (Gamma, Source of appreciation)*

The final first level category titled *Establishment recognition* follows from the previous category as it addresses an alternate form of appreciation. The more distinctive aspect of this category is that its contents focus on the acclaim of the organisation. Both categories that preceded it laid emphasis on the individual. This category, like that of *Blended identity*, presents perceptions that were expressed by participants who had been with their organisation for a considerable period of their lives. Here, some of the perceptions address the recognition of the organisation as a coincidental outcome (Alpha), implying its likely place within this subsection. The descriptions within the data that pointed to the state of recognition of educational NGOs are justifiably represented by the one given below.

> *Now [as compared to its nascent stage], it's a big NGO, well known NGO. (Kappa, Establishment recognition)*

Here, there were some critical perceptions that addressed how participants judged their association with their organisation and work as significant to their professional situation. The following chapter constructs both an analytic and interpretive discussion founded on this section and the last with references to the theoretical framework of the study.

6 Discussion

This chapter brings together different elements of the study. In that respect, the development of the chapter hinges on how it addresses the research question, links the results with the theoretical base of the study and derives further meaning therein. This directs the study towards a more interrelated understanding of its topic.

The research question for this study was stated as such: *How do NGO professionals in the education sector perceive the significance of their work?* In accordance with the research question, the findings revealed that the ways of experiencing the significance of work were developed within the broad categories of *Personal significance* (5.1) and *Professional significance* (5.2). These categories were further developed within first and second level categories of description. As per the perceptions of the significance of work, there was a slightly more emphasis on the professional level than the personal one. Between the two, there were both implicit and explicit outcomes of the significance of work embodied in the experiences of the participants. The manner in which these two categories answered the research question is more closely addressed in the following two paragraphs.

At the personal level, the significance of work was developed within the second level categories *Stability*, *Intrinsic satisfaction* and *Implicit effect*. These were further defined by nine first level categories. Explicitly, the significance of work was perceived in the terms of it how it contributed to the state of stability in the lives of the NGO professionals and their internal sense of satisfaction linked to work. The implicit outcomes at this level, on which there was considerably less emphasis, illustrated how the significance of work was perceived in a negative manner as it severely impacted their work/life dynamic and how it affected their lifestyle and daily interactions. While the participants did express the challenging effects of their work on their personal and social lives, many did so in a way that made it seem like their professional lives took precedence.

At the professional level, the understanding of the significance of work was constituted within the second level categories of *Relational depth*, *Positional influence*, *Systemic impact* and *Externality*. Altogether, they were comprised of ten distinct first level categories that embodied precise experiential details of the significance of work. To that extent, participants expressed perceptions of the significance of work in relation to the meaningful social connections formed at work, the sense of influence and authority they developed through their pro-

fessional position and the kind of impact they were able to establish in the field of their work. Furthermore, their perceptions of the significance of their work at the professional level pertained to externalities that were given by the appreciation and recognition of their work and an inadvertent merging of the personal and professional identities. As developed here, this was how the participants or NGO professionals perceived the significance of their work.

A significant aspect of the findings was the context in relation to which the significance of work was perceived or experienced. Be it the organisational space or the area of focus of the work of NGOs, these work contexts were perceived to deeply affect the mental state, sense of purpose, work/life dynamic, social connections at work and one's understanding of their part in the process of social and educational transformation. Mostly, the relationship between the significance of work and work context was defined by its beneficence in relation to the participants. However, this attribute of the relationship was likely developed through repeated experiences of the significance of work that were rooted in the challenging nature of the work context itself.

The data reflected that there were distinct difficulties in working directly with people from different and poorer socioeconomic contexts. These difficulties were to seen to induce emotions of doubt and despair in the NGO professionals. The harbouring of these emotions could critically affect the morale, more generally, emotional well-being, of NGO professionals and could lead to an existential impasse. If such a state of mind persisted over a prolonged period of time it could manifest as resentment or cynicism towards the work. Therein, the significance of work would be viewed negatively. Yet, as is shown repeatedly in the findings, the significance of work was perceived in a positive manner. A likely interpretation is that the process of enduring hectic work practices and difficult work contexts built a more resilient mental state, which is another way the significance of work is manifested in the lives of NGO professionals. This state of emotional resilience was crucial in overcoming feelings of doubt, fear and anxiety that stem from the context of the work of NGOs. Additionally, in being able to frame their sense of purpose with regard to their work context, NGO professionals were able to draw greater meaning from their daily work in relation. This was possibly a reassuring notion to the NGO professionals when working with communities that did not easily respond to their work. Thus, it can also be associated with surmounting mental blocks. Here, it was important to acknowledge the complex effects of the work contexts of NGO professionals in order to critically appreciate their experiences of the significance of their work.

The place of career choice in perceiving the significance of work was both implied and explicitly stated in the responses of participants. For example, the significance of work, in the categories of *Ideological alignment* (5.1.2) or *Power to effect change* (5.2.2), was established in terms of personal beliefs or goals, both of which are cognitive-person variables in the career choice process (Lent et al., 2000, p. 36). More specifically, with respect to the latter category, participants viewed themselves as activists and, thus, chose a career wherein they could promote their activism. This brings out another cognitive-person variable, the notion of self-efficacy as developed in section 2.1, as it highlights the participants' perceptions of their capacity to influence change. While individual characteristics of the like were crucial to the career choice process, contextual considerations played just as significant a role for some participants. The results of this study support Lent et al. (2000, p. 38) and Paloş and Drobot's (2010, pp. 3407-3408) view, in section 2.1, that an individual's choice of career is impacted by various aspects of the family. In that, as developed in the second level category of *Stability* (5.1.1), there were several emotional, social and economic concerns posed by the participants' families which influenced their choice of work.

Many of the concerns stated above were also felt by the participants independent of their families. For example, Kappa's direct quote in the category of *State of mind* (5.1.1) exemplifies Emmerling and Cherniss's (2003) perspective on the place of emotions in making career related decisions (p. 130). There were additional concerns on the part of the family that pertained to gendered perspectives (Hackett, 1997, p. 235), such as that the teaching profession was more suited to women. Despite such contextual variables, a few participants relayed that they were moved to pursue a career in the NGO sector on their own terms. Such descriptions were in contrast to Lent et al.'s (2002) insistence on the importance of social encouragement as a contextual basis for meeting career choices (p. 67). Social encouragement may be instrumental in supporting the realisation of a career choice, but if it is not aligned to an individual's intrinsic interests and dispositions it cannot be regarded as encouragement per se. For instance, a participant who held an educational degree in a subject that was unrelated to the social sector eventually took to working within it because it was closely related to their interests. This choice of career was contrary to the expectations of their family, thus it affected the kind of encouragement provided by them. In this manner, at times, personal attributes were prioritised over contextual support in the decision-making process of a career choice. These descriptions were crucial to the formation of the category of *Intrinsic satisfaction* (5.1.2), especially in relation to *Sense of purpose* (5.1.2). It was within this framework of cognitive-

person variables and contextual variables that participants perceived the significance of their work.

The descriptions of the significance of work in the education sector provided examples of the indispensable place of social justice in said work and its possible and established impact. As stated by Iota in the category of *Power to effect change* (5.2.2), several organisations including Iota's were contextualising their efforts with regard to specific aspects linked to education. As their domain is small, they are not only able to implement a more focussed solution but also closely monitor and control it to prevent inefficiencies in the process of implementation. Therein, the significance of their work could be seen in terms of the reduction in the extent of social injustice in disadvantaged contexts, the presence of which affects schooling systems as identified by Ford and Moore (2013, p. 403), Lupton (2005, p. 595) and Thrupp and Lupton (2006, p. 311) in section 2.2.

The stance of social justice was mostly inherent in the work of participants as they were part of NGOs that were set up to aid communities in disadvantaged contexts to ensure they received proper educational resources. It is a characteristic that is symbolised in the constitution of the category of *Ideological alignment* (5.1.1) that emphasised the significance derived from the match between personal and organisational ideology. In this regard, work becomes more meaningful as individual ideological positions are viewed as representations of a larger social thought. This is accentuated in responses of participants that described being a part of a process that reflected their own idea of education. In that manner individuals feel more connected to the work being done not only within their organisation but also within the broader field of education. The idea of change is then established in terms respective ideologies and not explicitly in terms of organisational vision. To that extent, participants were able to see the significance of their understanding of equality, freedom and democracy, all tenets of social justices, come alive through their work. Examples of significance in this regard included recognising the needs of disabled learners, a commonly neglected aspect within the social justice discourse (Polat, 2011, p. 50), and reforming teacher education to facilitate further equality in classrooms, which is also emphasised by Katsarou et al. (2010, p. 150).

The perceptions of the impact of work closely addressed the scale of the impact. In that, the impact was mainly felt at the micro level with regard to the instances outlined in the perspectives of Gao (2009, p. 16), Makuwira (2004, p. 113) and Nishimunko (2009, p. 281) in section 2.3. There were, however, minor references to NGOs being a link between the macro and mi-

cro levels in relaying information between the two. With respect to the macro level, contrary to the Haque's (2002, p. 412) view, NGO professionals did not see their work as disrupting the structure or potency of government systems. In fact, there were claims that governmental influence was limiting the scope of their work. Therein, the significance of their work in terms of impact was limited to the micro level. Such is emphasised in Zeta's direct quote within the category of *State of education* (5.2.3), where impact is seen at the grassroots level through teacher education workshops for government school teachers. This shows the presence of government–NGO collaboration, contrary to the concerns of Makuwira (2004, p. 115). Also, it establishes an internal conflict between perceptions regarding the position of the government in relation to NGOs. This could possibly be rooted in the difference of perceptions between governments and NGOs regarding the role of NGOs. That is, governments may see NGOs as facilitative bodies while NGOs may see themselves as more than merely supplementing governmental policies and practices. This notion of how NGOs view themselves is developed in the category of *Community development* (5.2.3), where participants felt they were directly responsible for the progress of the communities they catered to.

Participants also addressed the scope of expanding the significance of their work that they experienced through the impact of their work. This was mainly attributed to the possibility of increasing collaborative practices between other NGOs and relevant bodies in the developmental sector. Implicitly, referencing Klees's (2008) article, it highlights the current lack of broad collaborative efforts; which, may be the result of increased competition over acquiring funding (p. 22). Another potential explanation to the absence of collaboration may lie in the understanding that organisations or government systems are concerned about their own effectual influence and recognition. Herein, an unexpected finding was that, despite the multiple conceptions of the influence of NGOs, there was the perception that NGOs were not capable of instituting change but merely enabling it. Contrary to Haque (2002, p. 412), Klees (2008, p. 22) and Pillay's (2010, p. 100) views, it was developed further that the power to impact change lay solely with the government. This might indicate how NGO professionals see the scope of the significance of their work in relation to larger and more powerful bodies. By extension, it is also an indication of their understanding of their own professional identity as it is linked to the place of the NGO within the framework of society. This may especially be pertinent to the heads of organisations as their professional position is represented in the recognition of the organisation, an aspect that is developed in the category of *Establishment recognition* (5.2.4).

An anticipated part of the findings was that the significance of work would be viewed in relation to one's sense of identity. The place of identity was implied in descriptions pertaining to both personal and professional levels. To that extent, its relevance in the experiences linked to the significance of work was embodied within a wide set of categories. Interestingly, the most defining experiences of the significance of work in terms of identity were linked to the personal level. For instance, in Theta's direct quote in *Basis for empowerment* (5.1.1), there is a visible representation of the considerable changes to their identity with regard to their familial environment. Or, the change felt in one's personal identity in reassessing and restructuring one's lifestyle as described in *Implication of work knowledge* (5.1.3). These changes in personal identity were largely influenced by the development of the professional identities of the participants.

Participants expressed a deep understanding of their professional identities. In part, this can be attributed to the social space within organisations as talked about in *Shared space* (5.2.1). The space allowed for flexible and open interactions between people at different hierarchical positions. Thereby, the nature of role relationships (Sluss & Ashworth, 2007, p. 11) between two employees at different levels was much more accommodating of both identities involved. Essentially, this helped in facilitating meaningful relationships (Dobrow & Higgins, 2005, p. 569) that were central to an NGO professional's process of understanding and reshaping their conceptions of their professional selves (Ibarra, 1999, p. 765) in relation to those relationships. Such a relational identity (Sluss & Ashworth, 2007, p. 11) is quite plainly elaborated in Iota's excerpt, in *Meaningful relationships* (5.2.1), regarding their professional identity development having a strong basis in their boss's professional journey.

A more prominent aspect of professional identity was that participants were able to see their work as enabling them to be an intrinsic part of a larger social collective (Haslam et al., 2000, p. 323). This was established either with respect to *Shared space*, *Place in the organisation* or *Relevance in society*. As established earlier in this section, working with disadvantaged communities can be a difficult process to endure. To that end, well-formed social and relational identities perhaps empower participants to see their work within a structure of reciprocal support and not merely as a solitary effort. The extent of meaning participants associated with their work is emblematic of how essential their work is to their identity. So much so, there was reference to the notion that without work one cannot claim to have established an identity. Here, the intensity of the experiences of the significance of work was not only character-

ised by merely the formation of identity but also the merging of two identities, that of personal and professional, as given in *Blended identity* (5.2.4).

With regard to the findings, there were some surprising perceptions of the significance of the work of NGO professionals. These perceptions were considered surprising in contrast to my prior experiential knowledge of NGO professionals being underpaid for the amount of work they put in and/or that their personal and social lives were engulfed by their work lives. To an end, this study revealed different. First, some participants felt that they were being paid proportionately to the value and contribution of their work. Secondly, there were descriptions stating that the consuming nature of their work did not, in any manner, affect or impede the time meant for their personal lives. This notion is also contrary to certain studies (Buddhapriya, 2009; Padaki, 2007) on the work/life conflict stemming from work associated with NGOs (p. 31; p. 72). This lack of work/life conflict was attributed to cooperative familial and social structures that allowed the participant to devote time to their work without facing any challenges to their familial or social commitments. Still, the time-consuming effect of work was not exactly diminished. This possibly implies that the experiences of the significance of work had come about in being heavily engrossed in the work itself.

What is relevant to the both the aforesaid findings is that there were perceptions that these experiences differed widely between organisations. For instance, apparently there were NGOs, not pertaining to the participants per se, where the funds allocated for the NGO workers were being misappropriated, thus, leading to smaller salaries. As for the work/life conflict, even in the absence of a supportive social structure, work requirements across organisations were not equally inhibitive of the processes in the participants' personal lives. In this regard, the perceptions of the significance of one's work were conceived as a comparison of the state of work in other NGOs.

The categories of description of the experiences around the significance of work emerged organically from the data. They were prescriptive of a rather specific context and therefore the emphases of those categories were different from the general frame of the significance of work cited in Williams et al. (1975, p. 51) and Rim's (1977, p. 135) studies. Apart from the hierarchical, categorical structure of the outcome space, there were some other key differences between the two. First, the names of categories in the frame (Rim, 1977, p. 135; Williams et al., 1975, p. 51) do not point to the implicit experiences of the significance of work that were clearly defined in the outcome space. Secondly, while there is a category entitled

'power' within Williams et al.'s (1975, p. 51) frame, its implications are vague. The outcome space, on the other hand, clearly acknowledges the experiences of the implications of the power of the work of NGO professionals within *Systemic impact* (5.2.3). The experiences cited in this category come closest to the notion of contribution as developed in Rosso et al.'s (2010, p. 115) frame of the meaningfulness of work. Nonetheless, given the generic quality of Williams et al.'s (1975, p. 51) frame, there were descriptions across all levels of the outcome space that addressed various aspects of it. The outcome space embodied the voices of the NGO professionals interviewed here, therein, allowing entry into understanding the depth and importance of an experience in relation to the significance of work. Altogether, the outcome space and the perceptions covered in the findings, although, not as general as the frames referenced here, provide a wholesome and coherent understanding of the work of educational NGO professionals and their relation to it.

Broadly, this section embodied several interpretive meanings associated with the findings and substantiated aspects of the findings with conceptual references and vice versa. The following chapter outlines some further reflections pertaining to this research.

7 Additional considerations

As the penultimate chapter of this study it entails a comprehensive analysis of its contents, processes and relevance. In this regard, the chapter examines its overall integrity as a phenomenographic study and explores its likely uses and further contributions as a part of a body of research on the significance of work.

7.1 Review of the study

This section establishes the quality or trustworthiness of the study by examining its contents and methods. In this regard, trustworthiness is assessed in terms of credibility (Fossey et al., 2002, p. 722; Whittemore et al., 2001, p. 530), authenticity (Fossey et al., 2002, p. 721; Whittemore et al., 2001, p. 530), transparency (Fossey et al., 2002, p. 723) and limitations of the study. Also, the concept of reflexivity (Berger, 2015, p. 220) is developed here as it influences most of these aspects and was used as an evaluative tool throughout the course of the study.

Qualitative research as a form of methodological inquiry and exploration is subject to the test of quality of its outcomes. This has resulted in the establishment of a range of criteria for understanding quality based on variations of validity and reliability (Seale, 1999, p. 466). An increase in the criteria has only meant that there has been a lack of consensus on the determination of quality (Seale, 1999, p. 467; Whittemore et al., 2001, p. 522). A commonly cited evaluation framework for ascertaining the trustworthiness of qualitative research relies on the notions of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability as essential substitutes for internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity, respectively (Fossey et al., 2002, p. 723; Seale, 1999, p. 468). Even so, the representation of previously established terms as broader and more research sensitive categories would fail to appropriately gauge the quality of qualitative accounts. This is so because qualitative research embodies a milieu of methodologies, each with a unique set of methods for conducting and understanding research, that are quite apart from one another in terms of their theoretical viewpoints, aims and, therefore, outcomes as well. In this regard, the study sides with the perspective of Fossey et al. (2002), the criteria for judging the quality of qualitative research should be aligned to its aims and respective theoretical paradigm (p. 723). To that extent, the quality of qualitative research can be understood in relation to the credibility and authenticity of its contents (Whittemore et al., 2001, p. 530) and the transparency of its methods and processes (Fossey et al., 2002, p. 723).

Credibility and authenticity are supplementary to one another as they are closely related to the contents of the study (Whittemore et al., 2001, p. 530). Credibility is established in terms of how accurately the relativistic nature of truth is developed, as embodied in the interpretivist and phenomenographic stances, and meaning of the data interpreted (ibid.). In this regard, the study focussed explicitly on emphasising the variations in experiences of the significance of work that brought out its relativistic quality. As for the adequacy of the interpretation of the meaning of the data, especially with respect to the categories of description, I have used direct quotations from the participants' responses to support my interpretations. As per phenomenographic concerns cited in section 3.1, despite the hierarchical positions of the categories, the constitution and names of the categories across all levels are such that each of them highlights a distinctive interpretation. Therein, the structural emphasis on any one category is limited to an extent. Additionally, the meaning derived from the perceptions in the data had a strong basis in the context as stated in chapters five and six and therefore also influenced the formation and grouping of the categories of description. This addressed the concern around the lack of context in the development of the categorical structure of the outcome space. Also, as is established in the introduction, the context of the study was critical to its development. The concept of context is more closely understood in relation to authenticity.

Authenticity is judged in terms of how realistically the findings represent the perspectives of the studied participants and the social context in relation to which their perceptions were formed (Fossey et al., 2002, p. 723). To that extent, direct quotations were not only used to validate my own interpretations but also to give a voice to the participants. That is, the presentation of the results of this study was grounded in the social realities of the participants as understood by them. The authenticity of this study may be questioned on the basis of the implications of the process of translation. Even though translation was rather limited and specific to certain parts of an interview, the translated data was part of the analytical process. A key effect of translation on the authenticity of the representation of the participants' perspectives is that the source language becomes invisible (Temple & Young, 2004, p. 166). Except for a brief reference to the vernacular tongues of the participants, this effect was largely unaddressed. Furthermore, in translation there is a possibility of the loss of meaning embedded within the source language (ibid.) which would potentially affect both the credibility and authenticity of the study. In this regard, in all stages of analysis I have constantly reviewed the semantic relevance of my translation against the source language so as to preserve the initial and inherent meaning. This also points to the level of transparency present in this study.

The transparency of a study implies the extent of openness with which details of the processes of data collection and analysis are shared. It is necessary to recognise that quality, as given by its credibility or authenticity or other such criteria, is dependent on the type of qualitative research techniques or methods employed to gather and evaluate data (Whittemore et al., 2001, p. 532). To that extent, a drawback of the purposive sampling method is that it is difficult for the reader to judge the credibility of the study when details of the process are absent (Elo et al., 2014, p. 4). In view of this, the process of selecting participants was clearly explained in section 4.1 with specific details of the criteria used to judge their prospective relevance to the study. The details of the interview structure and how it was set up were also cited in the same section and the frame of the questionnaire is given Appendix 2. This gives a sense of how the interview process was constructed and further carried out. Following the interview process, I am certain that the transparency of the manner in which the data were analysed and distilled into categories of description was visibly established in section 4.3. Altogether, ensuring the transparency of the research methods and processes used in this study was a key factor in enhancing the readability of the study.

Transparency in relation to data collection methods demands the observance of ethical considerations in conducting research. This is of utmost importance in any research, be it quantitative or qualitative. For instance, the manner in which a researcher gets access to a particular social group may potentially affect the responses of the participants within that group (Orb et al., 2001, p. 93). In line with that, the research design of this study accommodated ethical concerns. First and foremost, as per my knowledge, no participants were harmed during their participation in the study. All participation was explicitly voluntary and without the motive of an incentive. Maintaining ethical guidelines, participants were clearly informed of their rights within the scope of this research through means of an informed consent form as given in Appendix 1. This document reinforced their autonomy in taking part or later withdrawing from the research without any punitive repercussions. It also assured them that their identity and knowledge of participation in this study would be protected. As is evident in the changes to the personal and professional details linked to the identification of the participant, this study strictly maintains participant confidentiality. All of the interviews were conducted with close regard to participants' time and convenience. Additionally, before, during and after an interview all participants were related to with sincere respect. Throughout the study, all roles and persons, including the authors of the works cited here, were referred to in gender neutral terms.

In a sense, the presence of this section in the study indicates the basis on which reflexivity is developed. It has been previously established that the researcher, in line with the axiological position of interpretivism and phenomenography, affects the process of the research. Therefore, whether or not the researcher or investigator can be prevented from influencing the research should not be the prime concern, but how the researcher evaluates their effect on the process of the research (Malterud, 2001, p. 484). This is where reflexivity comes in. Reflexivity is defined as a process wherein the researcher engages in a constant internal dialogue and self-reflection on their position in the research and how it affects the outcomes of the study (Berger, 2015, p. 220). At the start of the research process, I acknowledged that my background and previous experiences of the significance of work would possibly affect the framework and course of the research. Having a general understanding of my own position as a researcher set a base for further evaluation. Thereby, throughout the progress of the study I was able to review my position at the time with respect to my initial stance. The process was not only limited to that. Following every interview, I evaluated my role in each interview in terms of how I acted as a researcher in that interview and how it compared to my position in other interviews. In that way I was able to reduce any unsolicited influence on my part and avoid repetitive interactive patterns that may limit the scope and integrity of the responses of the participants. According to Malterud (2001), what builds the credibility of a research is the presentation of the reflexive accounts of the researcher, every so often, in its documentation (p. 484). I have done so most clearly at the end of section 4.2 where I write about how I moderated my own interactions with the research participants. In practicing reflexivity and documenting it, I was also improving the level of authenticity as well as transparency of the study. This was so because I was able to delve more critically into how I was encouraging and later representing the voices of the participants and meticulously outline my own process of doing so. Just as every aspect of this study was continuously reviewed and revised as was my own position in directing its development.

In the establishment of this study there were a few limitations. One of the main limitations of this study was that the gender ratio of the group of research participants was rather disproportionate. Specifically, there were substantially more women than men. Even though it did not affect the process of answering the research question, there was an inherent imbalance, between genders, in the representation of the perceptions of the significance of work. Another is that, at times, descriptions of experiences tended to be superficial and given the time frame of the interview there was not much scope to probe those responses further. Therefore, some

descriptions of experiences were weakly linked to their respective categories. In retrospect, it is likely that this study did not reach the level where data saturation is evident. Thereby, the overall quality of the study is possibly affected to a certain extent (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p. 1408). As cited by Yates et al. (2012), the saturation point is reached when no further perceptions of the phenomenon in question can be determined (p. 103). Using that as a point of reference, I found that while there were overlaps between interviews, every interview embodied a considerable amount of variation in perceptions of the significance of work. This level of variation did not substantially depreciate by the end of the data collection process. Therefore, I am of the opinion that the point of data saturation was not reached. A further limitation in this regard concerns that of the medium of language. While participants were able express themselves in the English language, I am rather certain that some of them would have been able to express themselves in more depth had they been speaking entirely in their vernacular tongue. Also, despite reiterating the private nature of the interview, I suspect the responses of some participants were affected by other organisational person or persons' knowledge of their participation in the research. Here, it was difficult to judge the extent of influence of such circumstances on the responses of the participants.

Like so, the trustworthiness of the study was established. The following section discusses the broad implications of the study.

7.2 Implications of the study

As per its name, this section establishes the possible implications of this study. Therein, the scope of the subject matter of this study is not simply limited to addressing the research question. Broadly, the relevance of this study is developed in relation to working professionals, organisational structures and the SDGs stated in section 1.2.

While there are aspects of the study that are typical of NGO work in the education sector, they likely apply to other NGO work or work linked to other organisations. For example, the categories of description, excepting those pertaining explicitly to education, viewed independent of their constituent perceptions, provide a detailed framework on the probable ways by which most people perceive the significance of their work. In essence, it could be useful to various organisations in understanding their employees better and developing meaningful work experiences for them. Conversely, working professionals may use the structure of the outcome space to develop or judge their own perceptions of their work with regard to the categories of

description. This framework of the significance of work also adds to its previous conceptualisations. More importantly, the study developed the perspective on the significance of work by establishing it in relation to career choice, work principle, impact of work and professional identity. These are aspects that are rather relatable to most types of jobs.

The contents of this study informs on how the work of educational NGOs is pertinent to a few select SDGs. A critical premise of the framework of SDGs is that the process of development is an interconnected and collective effort. A premise that is especially crucial to ensuring quality education for all, which is the point of emphasis in Goal 4 of the SDGs (United Nations, 2015, p. 19). From the perceptions of the participants, it is evident that NGOs are rather committed to developing education in an inclusive and equitable manner concerning disadvantaged communities. Therein, laying stress on the centrality of a social justice approach towards achieving Goal 4 (ibid.). Following such an approach would also contribute to the reduction of several prevalent inequalities, a point of emphasis in Goal 10 of the SDGs (ibid., p. 23). However, the efforts of NGOs towards ensuring quality education are often scattered or uncoordinated and at times hindered by government systems. Therefore, the study implies that collaboration between different NGOs and government bodies in addressing pressing educational issues would effectively further the aims of Goal 4 (ibid.). Such collaborative efforts would also increase the overall significance of work not only in relation to NGO professionals but also systems of government and civil society organisations like NGOs.

The social commitment of NGOs as established above is also embodied in their member professionals. This forms the basis of attachment to jobs in the education sector and also determines the nature of the relationship between individuals and their jobs. For instance, how much time they put into work or how the outcomes of their work affect them at a personal level. In view of the challenging effects of work on the personal lives of NGO professionals, organisations should be mindful of how their work impacts their employees' personal lives. This relates to point 8.5 of Goal 8 of the SDGs (ibid., p. 22), underlining decent work for all. In this regard, the results of this study imply that an organisation should particularly ensure that its work requirements do not significantly disrupt their employees' work/life balance and affect their emotional well-being. By promoting the emotional well-being of their employees, an organisation essentially contributes towards achieving point 3.4 of Goal 3 of the SDGs, emphasising mental health. Therefore, it is important for NGOs and other organisations as well to not only look to enhance their outward impact but also to maintain an internally healthy and constructive work ethic.

With respect to Goal 5 of the SDGs (ibid., p. 20), highlighting gender equality, this study establishes its importance particularly with regard to mothers in disadvantaged sections of society. It shows the benefits of empowering mothers in such contexts vis-à-vis their children's learning capacities. Efforts in this regard focussed on developing the mothers' knowledge about their role in their child's social and cognitive development and providing them with adequate resources to that extent. This directly contributed to advancing gender equality as it increased the relevance of the mother, compared to the father, in the child's perspective and also allowed the mother to take agency of her child's development process. In a sense, it also helped reduce the overall inequality within families in such disadvantaged communities. Therefore, NGOs and government systems need to target women's empowerment issues within a holistic strategy to promote and sustain inclusive and equitable quality education.

A significant critique of the SDG framework, as established by Pogge and Sengupta (2015), is that it is ambiguous about assigning responsibility in relation to each of its proposed goals (p. 573). Therein, it potentially undermines its scope and success in ensuring conscientious developmental practices (ibid., p. 574). Alternatively, it could be argued that in the absence of a specific structure of accountability, there emerges an innate sense of responsibility within people such as NGO professionals to partake in promoting some form of development. With regard to this study, it was social and educational development of people belonging to underprivileged sections and underdeveloped systems. In this regard, the study explicitly represented how civilians such as NGO professionals thought of themselves as being a part of a collective responsibility to ensure development, for example, in terms of establishing quality education. This shows how parts of the agenda of the SDG framework could be met even when particular responsibilities have not been predetermined.

Despite the specificity of this study, there were some varied implications pertaining to both practical situations and the field of education research.

8 Conclusion

This study ascertained that the significance of work as perceived by the research participants was bracketed between two categories titled *Personal significance* and *Professional significance*. While these categories were identified as the two broad ways in which NGO professionals perceived the significance of their work, they were represented through more explicit categories directed at a more precise understanding. The constitution of these categories within the outcome space ensured that the focus of phenomenographic research on collective experience was maintained. The methodology of phenomenography provided the platform to closely interact with participants and facilitate their process of reflection on the meaning of their perceptions of the significance of work. The research brought together various elements critical to the work of NGO professionals such as context, choice, principle, impact, identity in framing its significance. This established a novel framework of understanding the significance of work separate from its earlier conceptualisations.

This research process has been a lengthy yet significant learning experience. It has allowed me to expand my own understanding, as a researcher and a former NGO professional, of what it means to perceive the significance of work. Contrasting my prior experiences as an NGO professional against those of the participants in this study, I realised that the reasons behind my choice of work were categorically different from theirs. I believe the choice on my part was centred more around me than on the work itself. Additionally, as I gathered from the data, an element of preparedness was a prerequisite for a balanced mental state in sustaining one's self through the intense work routine of an NGO. In retrospect, I have come to accept that I was not prepared to take on the kind of social responsibility that was associated with NGO work. In this regard, I was able to deeply appreciate the resolve, as implied below, of NGO professionals interviewed in this study. Perchance, were I to think about working in an NGO in the foreseeable future I would critically evaluate such a choice against my learning from this study, especially in relation to the work context and my own identity.

> *If I talk about everyone who is involved in the social sector, we are a group of individuals who, I would say, are very dedicated, motivated, towards whatever we choose. (Iota)*

The study developed that the NGO professional is a complex entity and a vital part of the education sector. In a country such as India where education systems are in disarray and socio-

economic conditions of countless communities are subpar, one can only hope that all efforts directed at educational development be valued equally. The work of NGO professionals is a large part of those efforts, and this study established that. To begin to see a change in the education systems and its associated communities, it must start with the acknowledgement on the part of both the NGOs and government systems that the other is crucial to the advancement of the state of education. This also means the recognition of the basic unit of an NGO, the NGO professional. If the significance of their work is only recognised by the professionals themselves it may give way to the impression that their work is neglected. To that extent, organisations should be continuously revising the ways of improving their employees' experiences of the significance of their work.

Building on the perspectives of NGO professionals, this study emphasised the centrality of the notion of social justice in their decisions and practices. In this respect, NGO professionals have clearly been established as effective agents in leading social and educational transformations in the contexts of their work. To that extent, this research proposes that developmental processes should strictly adhere to a social justice approach as it would greatly improve the overall state of education and reduce the extent of inequality. This study also clearly puts forth that, if the agenda of the SDG framework is to be furthered, it is imperative that developmental actors form collaborative networks that allow them to strengthen and expand their impact. These are some of the changes that this study envisions at the systemic level.

It is my earnest hope that this study inspires not only NGO professionals but all professionals alike to explore the meaning attached to their work as a way to develop their own significance in this world.

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Appendix 1

Informed consent for participating in research

This informed consent form provides you, as a research participant, with general information about the research, its purpose and your rights as a participant.

General information

I am enrolled as a student in the Master's Programme in Education and Globalisation, at the Faculty of Education, University of Oulu. As a part of my studies, I am conducting a research in educational NGO professionals' perceptions of the significance of their work. The purpose of my research is to document, analyse and understand how NGO professionals in the education sector perceive the significance of their work. I kindly request your consent for collecting information from you, for the purpose of this research, by means of an interview.

All information will be used anonymously, respecting your dignity. No personal details that enable your identification will be included in the analyses and reporting. Systematic care in handling and storing the information will be ensured to avoid any kind of harm to you. After all the information leading to identification of a person has been removed, the information will be archived electronically, following the guidelines of the Finnish Social Sciences Data Archive.

Voluntary participation

Your participation is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research at any time without any consequences. Observe that information collected before your withdrawal may be used. You have the right to get information about the research and may contact me if you have questions.

Confirming informed consent

☐ I am willing to participate in the research.
☐ I allow the use of information given by me for research purposes.
☐ I allow the information that I have provided to be stored and archived for further research use.

Date ___/___/20___

_____

Signature and name (in capital letters)

Researcher

_____

Signature

Chandril Roy Chowdhury

This research is supervised by: Dr Audrey Paradis, University of Oulu.

More information about research ethics and informed consent:

Finnish Board on Research Integrity

http://www.tenk.fi/en/ethical-review-in-human-sciences

Social Sciences Data Archive

http://www.fsd.uta.fi/aineistonhallinta/en/informing-research-participants.html#partIV-examples-of-informing-research-participants

http://www.fsd.uta.fi/aineistonhallinta/en/anonymisation-and-identifiers.html

Appendix 2

Reference for the interview process

Before the interview	
Prompt	Think about how you would describe the significance of your work.
During the interview	
Framing the significance of the choice of work	Talk about your understanding of education. How did you decide on your choice of career?
Deriving the significance of experiences as an NGO professional	In relation to your work, what are some values/beliefs and relationships that are important to you? Tell me about some experiences that have developed/challenged your sense of identity. At the organisation, how is your contribution/presence valued/appreciated? Tell me about some experiences where you have seen the impact of your work. How does your work affect the other aspects of your life? How has your attitude towards your work and the organisation changed with time?
Developing the meaning of the significance of work	What is your understanding of the significance of work? How do you see the significance of your work? —at the personal level and the systemic level.